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NEWS RELEASE

**HASTINGS PARENTS CHARGED WITH MULTIPLE CRIMES INVOLVING
THE ABUSE, ENDANGERMENT AND NEGLECT OF THEIR CHILD**

Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom announced that Mark Matthew Cortes, age 24, and Amanda Lee Hughes, age 24, both of Hastings, have been charged* with multiple crimes associated with the abuse, endangerment and neglect of their daughter. Specifically, the following charges have been filed:

Matthew Mark Cortes:

- Count I: Criminal Sexual Conduct in the First Degree (a felony)
- Count II: Use of a Minor in a Sexual Performance or Pornographic Work (a felony)
- Count III: Possession of a Pornographic Work Involving Minors (a felony)

Amanda Lee Hughes:

- Count I: Possession of a Pornographic Work Involving Minors (a felony)
- Count II: Endangerment of a Child (a felony)
- Count III: Endangerment of a Child (a gross misdemeanor)
- Count IV: Neglect of a Child (a felony)
- Count V: Neglect of a Child (a gross misdemeanor)

These crimes are alleged to have occurred from November 1, 2011 through October 24, 2012. Cortes and Hughes, who were the parents of a 5-year-old girl, lived in Cottage Grove in Washington County in November of 2011 and moved to Hastings in Dakota County in January of 2012. Under Minnesota law, all charges involving the abuse of a minor, including any which may have occurred in another county, may be charged by the County Attorney where the child victim currently resides.

These crimes allege that Mark Cortes sexually abused his daughter and filmed the abuse, which was later distributed to others. Additionally, both Cortes and Hughes are alleged to have been in possession of this pornographic work and others involving children. It is also alleged that Hughes was aware of the abuse occurring to her daughter and failed to protect her.

Additional facts pertaining to this case can be found online at <http://services.co.dakota.mn.us/ComplaintSearch>. If in custody, a mug shot can be viewed at <http://services.co.dakota.mn.us/InmateSearch>.

In addition to the state charges filed today, a federal investigation is continuing into this matter as it relates to the production and distribution of child pornography.

Backstrom commented: "The sexual abuse of any child and the production of pornographic work involving children is always extremely disturbing. The sexual abuse of a child in this manner can cause long lasting physical and emotional trauma."

Backstrom stated that this investigation began with an FBI probe concerning the distribution of child pornography over the Internet. The investigation uncovered evidence that someone at the residence where Cortes and Hughes resided was using email to send images containing child pornography to an email account in another country. Hastings police were contacted and they joined the FBI in executing a search warrant at this residence and arresting these individuals.

Backstrom noted that child protection proceedings have been commenced to protect the welfare of the child involved in this matter and she is currently in the custody of Dakota County Child Protection. Backstrom thanked the FBI, the Hastings Police Department and Dakota County Child Protection for their work in this case.

Cortes and Hughes made their first appearance in court today. Bail was set for Cortes in the amount of \$250,000 with conditions and bail was set for Hughes in the amount of \$15,000 with conditions by Dakota County District Court Judge Edward Lynch. Their next court appearance is set for November 20, 2012 at 9:00 a.m. in Hastings.

If you have questions, contact James Backstrom at 651-438-4440.

**Criminal charges are not evidence of guilt. A defendant/suspect is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.*