

A D D E N D U M
to
PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN
ONLINE AGAINST THE EVOLVING OFFENDER

This Addendum is available at:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-119shrg62972/pdf/CHRG-119shrg62972-add1.pdf>

Submitted by Chairman Grassley:

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November 29, 2025

Dear Senators,

My son could recite an essay's worth of facts about every animal before he started kindergarten. Starting around the age of 7 months, everyone (literally everyone, including strangers passing by in the grocery aisle) noticed his advanced verbal skills and intelligence. His presence immediately commands the room. He loves music and began playing drums at 18 months. He decided a few months later that he wanted to be a rock star, and has never swayed from that dream. He loves his family and friends fiercely and with loyal devotion.

Beginning in the summer of 2023, he fell deeper and deeper into a mental health spiral. All of that light and life was slowly fading away. He was self harming, completely isolated, full of rage, and losing touch with everything that made him happy. I begged for help from his providers (therapist, psychiatrist, and pediatrician) for months, telling them I felt like I was watching him commit suicide in slow motion. I was told it was normal teenage depression and rebellion, and that so many kids self harm and experience severe mental health crises now it's not a reason to escalate treatment. The inpatient and intensive outpatient spots are all full anyway.

The self harm kept getting worse. He talked about violence and politically extreme conspiracies nonstop. I kept begging for more intensive treatment, telling his providers I was watching him commit suicide in slow motion. All we received was increased medication and more "this is just how it is for teens now". What I didn't know at the time was that I was describing the checklist for children that may be entrapped in 764. It wasn't recognized until it was nearly too late.

In Feb 2024, he was hospitalized on a psychiatric hold after we discovered a large hunting knife he secretly bought online. The hospital staff described his entire torso, most of his arms and thighs as "covered" in self harm. My son told them he couldn't stop thinking about killing himself and what it would like to be dead, but he didn't really want to do it because he knew it would hurt his family. He asked to be admitted because he was scared the thoughts would take over and he couldn't keep himself safe. We still didn't know about his secret online life.

Over the next week, the local police and FBI got involved. I learned my son had bypassed my parental controls and hidden his online activity, becoming addicted to content posted online by 764 and other extremist NVE groups. This content, dubbed "ultra violent" by law enforcement, glorified self harm, suicide (often live streamed), murders, sexual assaults, and more. Children are coerced into posting and DM'ing

their own self harm and suicide CSAM content. Between his smartphone and school issued Chromebook, he was viewing these posts and websites up to 12 hours per day. A handful of video thumbnails gave me nightmares for a year. I hate to think of what it did to his developing, teenage brain.

He used the knife he purchased to perform “blood rituals” he saw in 764 content. Symbols from 764 and other extremist groups were carved into his body and drawn on paper with pencil and even his own blood. These rituals left permanent scars. He had hundreds of self harm photos on his phone, and in the 2 weeks before he was hospitalized, it increased to alarming levels. The day he was admitted inpatient, he had spent the school day online researching how to hang himself.

No one should ever have to see photos of their child this way. No child should ever be coerced into a hopeless, nihilistic view of life where the only release is harming yourself, but in reality they are producing the darkest, most violent CSAM imaginable.

I still can’t wrap my head around how this happened to my child.

I followed the strictest recommendations for parental controls, had screen time limits, blocked social media, and spot checked his online activity. I instilled values of tolerance, inclusion, prioritizing real world connections and time away from technology. I educated my kids to recognize extremism, conspiracy theories and watching out for creepy people online. Supposedly, I did everything “right”, but it wasn’t enough.

Thankfully, I saved his life, but it took 18 months of intensive therapy to stabilize him. Though stable, he is still working through the trauma of what happened to him, which could take years. He is alive, but neither he nor the rest of our family will never be the same.

Current laws meant no one was held accountable, and without consequences, the problem is growing exponentially. My son (who has had a flip phone since this happened) reports his classmates now see this content in their normal social media feeds, and it is more rampant than ever. An entire generation of children is being coerced into thinking self harm and suicide CSAM is “normal” because they see it every day online. We must pass laws that recognize the modern age of the internet and reality of online CSAM, so that no child has to experience this ever again.

Sincerely yours,

Dana Grueser

Senate Judiciary Committee

Our son, Walker Montgomery died on December 1, 2022 to an online scheme known as sextortion. In Walker's case, he was a well-adjusted young man (16 years old) with a great nuclear family, a tremendous friend group both at school and at church, and was very involved in sports. His passion was football and spending time with family on our farm.

At midnight December 1st someone pretending to be a young teenage girl messaged Walker through Instagram. Walker believed she was a "friend" of his contacts, this is part of the tactics used to build credibility. The conversation started innocently but led to Walker being coaxed into a sexual encounter. This encounter occurred over the live video portal through Instagram. What Walker didn't know, he was being recorded from the other side by a predator in Nigeria. After the encounter was over this person turned the conversation into an extortion scheme, if Walker didn't pay \$1,000, he would send the video of Walker in this act to all of his friends and family. The encounter started at midnight and was over between 3:00 – 4:00 a.m. with Walker taking his own life. Almost instantly, our son was gone and it was the beginning of a whole new life for everyone who loved Walker.

As parents, we thought we were doing everything right, we sent our kids to the right school, taught them how to work, and to respect their elders. All the attributes we normally associate with great kids. Looking back, we don't regret our parenting methods, we regret not understanding the risks that social media and the internet pose to children. As parents, we must have help from our lawmakers to protect our children. We are not asking for the government to parent our kids, we are asking it to come along side of us just as it's done with many other damaging activities in the past. Other areas where laws were implemented to protect children include minimum age requirements on alcohol and tobacco. The government knew that it held a valuable role in setting laws and a precedence that would help parents prevent addiction that could lead to harmful effects to children.

This particular online harm is becoming more advanced, just recently a young man in Kentucky was lost to sextortion, but in this case the predator used AI generated content. Children, especially teenage boys, are at a higher risk to this heinous crime. To date we have lost 46 teenagers to suicide due to sextortion through social media. That number of suicides has doubled since last year (2024). They are more prone to participate and more likely to harm themselves when things go wrong. Again, the FBI is warning families about the surge in financial sextortion schemes "TARGETING" minors.

We are grateful for lawmakers working to protect children but we must consider this urgent, our family knows first-hand how devastating this can be. It's reasonable for Federal Regulations to

place safeguards on tech companies that provide their products to minor children. In our case, if Meta would have routed this contact through us, Walker's parents or simply blocked the access from an unknown account he would be here today. Meta knew then about the harmful effects of their products on children and did nothing but continue to cash stock checks.

Please consider the devastating harms these products cause kids and families and move forward with legislation to help protect children.

Thank you

Brian and Courtney Montgomery

My 13 year old son Levi, had Instagram for 40 hours before he was murdered by a sextortionist who capitalized on Meta's lax safety standards to befriend, groom and target him! We all, Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, have witnessed an explosion of innovation during our lifetime, yet, as Isaac Asimov wrote, "the saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom." Although it's too late for Levi, I am calling on you, the elected officials of our nation, to expedite your judiciousness to protect the lives of your remaining constituents.

The 1966 Congress passed the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act because data showed that fatalities and injuries on the road had increased 6 fold in over 40 years. NCMEC reports that online enticement reports increased 300% between 2021 and 2023. Through just 6 months of 2025 it is up another 275% year over year. At this rate it will be 6 fold in just 24 months, not 40 years.

The first half of 2025 has seen a 75% increase in reports of financial sextortion, believed to be the most under-reported crime given the stigma attached, while Generative AI has grown 6500% in the same timeframe. That's not 6 fold, that's 650 fold! Your speed at regulating the tech industry needs to match this exponential growth, however instead, the legislative gap is immense. There are over 2,000 new apps being released on the Apple App Store EACH DAY. No parent can keep up with that!

Society has celebrated the rise of the internet and actually defended its ability to provide constant communication, constant access to data and money, and global connection. It's time to prioritize human life over profit! You must be judicious and pass legislation that makes immoral use of information technology unlawful and overhaul statutes like Section 230; because, just like car manufacturers and big tobacco, tech companies will not self-regulate when there is profit to be made.

Meta knows that they are endangering children by not installing safeguards, but our legal system has not provided a way to hold them accountable or force them to aid in the prosecution of the criminals responsible for killing our children. There is a way to balance free speech and innovation and stay true to the sentiments of the Constitution while protecting all citizens, especially children, from harmful content. Just like tobacco is a health hazard and cars are dangerous, the products of the information age require legislation that limits accessibility and use by minors and punishment for companies and persons that abuse this limitation. Our founding fathers NEVER intended there to be laws that would tolerate my 13 year old son's death to preserve the "freedom" of man.

Levi is not a statistic. He is a casualty of companies and lawmakers who prioritize profit and election over the safety of our nation's children. Levi's death, and those of hundreds of other American children were preventable. Platforms have been designed

to be addictive and are being aimed at naive children and teens. Levi's death was not an accident, it was the direct result of the lack of duty of care! At this stage, there aren't even laws to allow us to prosecute anyone for his homicide.

Levi was a 13 year old boy with a promising future. He was an athletic, intelligent, curious teenage boy with a magnetic personality. He was a regular kid, growing up in a middle-class, 2-parent, Christian household. He was raised around positive role models, was active in numerous sports, attended church and loved his small community. Levi spent the summer of 2024 with his friends, teammates and family, swimming, going on bike rides, playing basketball, making money doing odd jobs and just being a kid! Levi idolized his big brother, was his father's shadow and showered his mom with affection. Levi planned to attend a trade school, join ROTC and be a college athlete. His big dreams made him the perfect target because he had everything to lose! **Levi was seeking to connect through Instagram and it took his life instead!** Levi died as the victim of a crime he didn't likely know existed, and neither did I. But the social media companies knew. Read the following story and you will know too.

On *Sunday, August 18, 2024 at 8:30pm*- Levi sent me a request to download Instagram. There were parental controls in place on his iPhone and our family's "device guidelines" were hanging on the refrigerator. Levi likely wanted Instagram because social media is where colleges find athletes. I approved the request. On *Monday- August 19, 2024*- Levi completed his household chores, tagged along to work with his dad, attended his own football practice and ended the night at his middle school open house. On *Tuesday, August 20, 2024*- Levi prepared for school because the following day was to be his first day of 8th grade. He sharpened his pencils, charged his ChromeBook and laid out the perfect outfit. He was planning to stay! But, Levi was in Heaven before lunch!

Our family did not know what happened. Levi had been home alone. Days later, we were told by the State Police that Levi was the victim of sextortion. The County Coroner ruled his death a homicide. It was simple to determine who/what was responsible for Levi's death. I believe there are dual perpetrators- the company who created the knowingly dangerous platform and welcomed predators to it, and the evil person/group that connected with my child online. Levi was a new account. He was an adventurous, curious, teenage boy. The predator was a bad actor who was allowed to "friend", groom, and gain Levi's trust. Levi made one wrong turn in the digital world and his killer(s) flipped the script and instilled shame and fear into him. He panicked under their threats to destroy his family and because he was just 13 and had an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex, responsible for logic and reasoning, he couldn't think like Levi. When Levi died, our entire family was within 1 mile of home and his older brother was at work

just across the street. The criminal(s) and Big Tech execs took Levi from me, his dad, his brother, his friends, his teammates, and his FUTURE!

I understand that the goal of your committee was to identify a topic to learn about to be able to expand criminal law. Hopefully your experts and witnesses help you to learn about sextortion. I want you to see that this is a solvable, preventable issue. The tech executives are running companies with no integrity, putting profit before safety. Families like mine need you to make the changes so we can prosecute the criminals responsible for taking our children. Fix what's broken and allow law enforcement to investigate crimes of sextortion. Update the definitions and sentencing guidelines so it might deter predators from preying on American children and modernize the language to allow groups to be held responsible for the untimely deaths of children. CSAM goes against every fiber of the freedom our country stands for! There is SO much legislative action needed- we need a strong KOSA, like the version passed by the Senate last year with 91 votes. We need safe-by-design products and platforms. We need age verification to protect children from online harms. We need to update Section 230 to be consistent with the massive takeover of technology. It's time to close the loopholes.

I am an educator. My philosophy with my students and my own children has always been, when you know better, you have to do better. As a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, you now know better. I am also a grieving mom, turned advocate. I prefer to put my time into education and prevention because we won't arrest our way out, however I understand the need for statutes to hold criminals accountable. I am confident that the tide will shift. A grassroots movement is underway. Survivor parents are mobilized, criminal evidence is mounting and you can be part of the solution or part of the problem. Please, please, please, vote yes to a safe childhood. It won't help my family, but each day you wait, the next victim's family's heartache is on you!

Respectfully submitted on 12/1/25 by Tricia, Levi's mom

Amanda Zimmer

East Greenwich, Rhode Island

December 9th, 2025

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record regarding the protection of children online.

My name is Amanda Zimmer, and I am a mother from Rhode Island. I write to you not as an expert in technology or law, but as a parent who has experienced an unthinkable tragedy that no family should ever have to endure. I am here to be a voice for my son Owen, who can no longer not speak for himself, and to support countless other families living with the unique and never ending pain that comes with the loss of a child due to online harms. Online harms that could and should have been avoidable.

Owen was a bright child with a natural gift for electronics and technology. His grandfather was an electrical engineer, and they shared a passion for building and creating things. Over the years, they completed several engineering projects, including building a gaming computer when Owen was in middle school. These were some of Owen and his now also deceased grandfather's happiest times together — working together and bringing ideas to life.

I never saw technology as something inherently dangerous. My father used technology to help design the landing gear for the Space Shuttle, as well as the IED detection capabilities that protect our deployed service members. I grew up with an appreciation of the positive things technology could do when handled responsibly and a human-first purpose.

Owen had a smartphone, a PC, and a gaming system in elementary school. As Owen grew, so did the proliferation of platforms and what those platforms offered. He was an avid gamer, and followed and idolized Minecraft "YouTubers" like so many children did at the time. He eventually also started using Discord, Steam, Instagram, TikKok, etc. What I didn't understand then was how these platforms were affecting Owen's sleep, emotions, as well as thinking and cognition.

In fact, in recently unsealed court documents, there are internal records from Google in which these very harms are discussed. The documents state that "Gaming content on YouTube is sought out by inappropriately aged children," that "gaming content is being watched by viewers who are underaged to actually play the game, and that "watching this game content can become addictive, as well." Google's own document conclude that "If DSM Criteria were applied to watching gaming videos, 1 in 5 teens would be diagnosed with

addiction.” The internal Google study is dated 2018. I’ve attached a copy here, because it’s a document every parent deserved to see in 2018. It contains information Google knew about the health and safety of our children, and we did not. And it tracks with the struggles my son began to have.

Fast forward to the Spring of 2021. Owen was 14, and he got into trouble at school. During COVID and remote and asynchronous learning, he and a small group of other kids figured out how to shut down the server of the local public high school they were attending. Owen took the blame for the incident, not providing the names of the other boys involved. He was expelled from school and faced multiple criminal charges.

Owen had always been shy and had social anxiety. He had pushed through these issues and pursued his dream of playing Quarterback on the High School’s JV team. After being expelled and charged, however, he struggle to re-engage with high school. He became depressed and anxious. But then, he turned things around.

Owen opted to repeat his sophomore year at a local private school because he was concerned about his grades and getting into a good college. He was excited about school again, got back into sports, and participated in extracurricular activities. Owen started “Band Club” where he could play the drums and guitar and jam with other students, and he was selected as a “Nathan Hale Ambassador” for the school. He had a solid friend group and a girlfriend. He was working hard to succeed and rebuild his life.

But something was happening that I couldn't see. The social media platforms that claimed to be safe for children as young as 12 began to prey on my son. They began to exploit his vulnerability and insecurities and targeted Owen with incredible amounts of extremism, white supremacism, hate speech, and propaganda. The algorithms went for the kill. The more he engaged, the more they fed him these nightmares. They began targeting my son with intense suicide-promoting content, including massive amounts of videos and posts relating to "LooksMaxxing" and "RopeMaxxing." They connected him with individuals who made it their purpose to bully him and try to talk him into suicide. Non-stop, and without ever providing my son with tools to limit his use or otherwise protect himself from these harms.

On the morning of November 4, 2023, the day before his younger sister’s 13th birthday, we found Owen dead, hanging in his closet.

Since Owen's death, I have learned things that no parent should have to discover about the last months of their child's life. Specifically, not understanding what had happened or what possibly could have happened, I began to investigate his social media accounts and devices. What I found would horrify any decent human being, and yet, what I know now, is

that these are the kinds of experiences social media platforms are aiming at children every single day.

The nightmares that these platforms were force feeding my son were not random. These harms were the direct result of AI-driven recommendation algorithms designed to maximize engagement at the expense of our children. These companies are designing and distributing their products in a manner meant to manipulate and to keep users on their platform as long as possible. Literally, around the clock, and despite knowing that this means there are millions of children going without time to focus on school, to socialize with others, and to sleep. They are stealing every minute of the day they can, without remorse whatsoever. That is, quite literally, their business plan.

No matter what Owen sought out and searched for, if the algorithm determined it could hook him by sending something else, then that is what it did. And it did this around the clock.

These products pushed him down a rabbit hole, and more importantly, these companies knew that their products were designed to do so. Citing to more documents recently filed in lawsuits across the country, Meta knows that its ranking algorithms push users into “rabbit holes.” The following are just some examples of quotes from Meta’s own documents,

- “someone feeling bad sees content that makes them feel bad, they engage with it, and then their IG is flooded with it”)
- “if you start following borderline accounts or interacting with such content, our recommendations algorithms will start pushing you down a rabbit hole of more egregious content.”
- “well-being challenges: ... our ranking algorithms taking [users] into negative spirals & feedback loops that are hard to exit from.”
- “people who are suffering from depression and self-harm go down IG rabbit holes, and explore functionality compounds this issue.”
- “Once the young people start to self-injure, they tell us that their feed...on Instagram suddenly gets full of this content.”

These are quotes from Meta’s own documents.

TikTok likewise recognized that it could identify users caught in these cycles – cycles like the one that caught my son – and management’s response was to “deprioritize[]” mitigation efforts. While Google conducted various studies in 2018, determining that “It is also known

that YouTube's algorithms are designed in a way to increase 'rabbit hole' watch time and 'keep people hooked on the screen' (Lewis, 2018)." Other Google documents acknowledged that "Recommender algorithms take advantage of multiple aspects of brain development as well as adolescents' less developed self-regulation."

And on and on and on. These companies know what they are doing to American children like my son, Owen, they simply have chosen to prioritize their profits over human life.

By design, they take what might start as typical teenage insecurity or curiosity and turn it into an avalanche of increasingly extreme content. These algorithms identified Owen as someone who would engage, and they exploited that vulnerability for profit.

"LooksMaxxing" content, for example, preys on insecurities about appearance—and, in turn, may lead to "RopeMaxxing" content, which is a term used in online communities to discuss and promote suicide by hanging.

These platforms knew that Owen was a minor. They knew that he was being served suicide-promoting content and extremist material. Yet there was no intervention, no notification to his parents, no circuit breaker to stop the algorithmic radicalization of a vulnerable teenager.

I have also learned that Owen's experience is not unique. There are patterns here. Patterns of young people, particularly young men, being algorithmically pushed toward extremist ideologies and self-harm content. The platforms have the data. They know this is happening. But they have made a calculation that engagement and growth matter more than the lives of children.

Law enforcement has been unable to hold anyone accountable. The platforms claim protection under Section 230. They argue that they are merely hosting content, not actively pushing it to children. But that is fiction. These algorithms make active choices about what to show to whom. When an algorithm first addicts and then decides to recommend suicide content to a depressed teenage boy, that is not passive hosting. Those are the types of active choices that led to the death of my son.

I am not asking this Committee to ban technology or social media. Technology was something Owen loved. It was something that connected him to his grandfather, that allowed him to create and build and learn.

But what certain social media products have become is not about connection or creativity. These companies have designed their products to become engines of engagement that treat our children as data points to be analyzed and exploited and that no longer serve the public, but rather, treat the public as servants to these corporations. They take our data, without consent. And they use that data to push vulnerable young people toward

extremism and self-harm because they have learned that extremes can be effective at keeping growing brains scrolling.

This must change. Specifically:

These social media and AI platforms must be held accountable when their own design and programming decisions profile and push harm to minors. Section 230 was never intended to protect companies that take our data and use sophisticated artificial intelligence to push children toward suicide and extremism. There is a difference between passively hosting content and actively amplifying it to vulnerable users by design.

These social media and AI platforms must be required to design their algorithms and all of their products with child safety – and not engagement – as a primary consideration. In no other industry do we allow companies to purposefully prioritize profit over human life. Ford tried that with the Pinto, and we made it stop. Now we to do the same with these companies. This means requiring these companies to disclose the harms they know their products cause, the risks to the public so we can make informed choices; and it means safety features like circuit breakers that stop recommendation engines from pushing users into harmful rabbit halls; working reporting mechanisms and human review when minors are identified as at-risk; and complete transparency about how they are programming their algorithms as they relate to children.

Conclusion

Members of the Committee, I will never know everything that Owen was thinking in his final days. I will never fully understand how a bright, talented boy who loved building things with his grandfather and playing with his sister came to believe that he had no future.

But I do know this: the social media and AI products that addicted him then fed him a constant stream of extremist and suicide-promoting content played a direct role in his death.

I am not here seeking sympathy. I am here seeking action.

Owen is gone, and nothing you do will bring him back. But there are millions of children on these products right now. Some of them are being pushed down the same paths that Owen was pushed down. Some of them are one algorithmic recommendation away from the content that will radicalize them or convince them that their lives are not worth living.

You have the power to stop this. You have the power to require these platforms to value children's lives over engagement metrics. You have the power to give parents the tools and information they need to protect their children. You have the power to hold these companies accountable when they harm children by design. Not content. But

design. Because ultimately, these are the choices these platforms are making and not our children. If they wanted to operate their algorithms like a traditional search engine, to show children what they actually ask to see, that would be one thing. But that is not what is happening. That is now how these social media and AI products work.

So I am asking you to use your power. I am asking you to act with the urgency that this crisis demands. I am asking you not to let another parent lose their child the way I lost Owen.

Owen loved to build things. He loved to solve problems. He loved to create. He should be here today, working on his next project, planning for college, making music with his friends. Instead, I am here, begging you to ensure that the technology he loved does not destroy more lives.

Please do not let Owen's death be in vain. Please act.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this testimony. I am available to provide any additional information or answer any questions that may assist the Committee in its work.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Zimmer
East Greenwich, Rhode Island