

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN
ONLINE AGAINST THE EVOLVING OFFENDER

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

DECEMBER 9, 2025

Serial No. J-119-52

Printed for the use of the Committee on the Judiciary



www.judiciary.senate.gov
www.govinfo.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, Iowa, *Chairman*

LINDSEY O. GRAHAM, South Carolina	RICHARD J. DURBIN, Illinois,
JOHN CORNYN, Texas	<i>Ranking Member</i>
MICHAEL S. LEE, Utah	SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, Rhode Island
TED CRUZ, Texas	AMY KLOBUCHAR, Minnesota
JOSH HAWLEY, Missouri	CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, Delaware
THOM TILLIS, North Carolina	RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, Connecticut
JOHN KENNEDY, Louisiana	MAZIE HIRONO, Hawaii
MARSHA BLACKBURN, Tennessee	CORY A. BOOKER, New Jersey
ERIC SCHMITT, Missouri	ALEX PADILLA, California
KATIE BOYD BRITT, Alabama	PETER WELCH, Vermont
ASHLEY MOODY, Florida	ADAM B. SCHIFF, California

KOLAN DAVIS, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*

JOE ZOGBY, *Democratic Chief Counsel and Staff Director*

CONTENTS

OPENING STATEMENTS

	Page
Grassley, Hon. Charles E.	1
Durbin, Hon. Richard J.	2

WITNESSES

Coffren, Lauren	8
Prepared statement	31
Smolar, Jessica Lieber	6
Prepared statement	51
Woods, Tamia	5
Prepared statement	53

APPENDIX

Items submitted for the record	59
--------------------------------------	----

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN ONLINE AGAINST THE EVOLVING OFFENDER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2025

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:18 a.m., in Room 216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Charles E. Grassley, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Grassley [presiding], Graham, Cornyn, Hawley, Tillis, Blackburn, Britt, Moody, Durbin, Whitehouse, Klobuchar, Blumenthal, Hirono, Booker and Padilla.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF IOWA

Chairman GRASSLEY. Good morning, everybody.

Today's hearing will examine what we call the emerging issues involving child online exploitation and the evolving offenders that seem to keep up to date on everything they can do to harm these young people. As technology changes and evolves, so do bad actors who use it to commit all types of crime. This is especially true in the child exploitation space. Gone are the days of ordering child exploitation material from overseas by mail. Now, child exploitation material is readily available online through various file-sharing platforms, through direct access to victims and domestic and international websites, and groups such as "764".

Not only has technology changed, but today's online child offenders have changed as well. Today's online offender is more violent, more cruel, and more shocking than offenders just 20 years ago. Offenders will manipulate, pressure, harass, and seek to control vulnerable children through extortion, blackmail, and shame. That conduct is commonly called sextortion. Offenders extort children for money or other things of value, or to manipulate them to commit harmful acts, to live stream, or record for others to watch.

Today's offenders target younger children, many between the ages of 12 and 15, but some as young as 5 and 6, and maybe in some cases even younger. Offenders exploit multiple victims, causing more pain, causing humiliation and degradation to more people than ever before. They leave families of victims in insufferable pain and despair and cause a lifetime of recovery for many victims. Offenders feel emboldened to carry out their illegal conduct on our children because of access to private, hidden, online groups of like-minded people who share their sick desire to harm and exploit children.

Sadly, offenders often operate under the cover of secrecy, making it even more difficult for law enforcement to identify them and bring them to justice. They often focus on vulnerable populations, such as those with mental health issues, lack of strong family or community ties, or other insecurities. Offenders will often disguise their true identity and pretend to be of similar age or background to their targeted victims in order to gain their trust. Offenders seek an online relationship with a child to exploit them for money, for sexual images, or to cause them to commit harm to themselves or to others.

When offenders are eventually caught by law enforcement, prosecutors charge them with the most appropriate charges. However, there are no specific laws to address the terrible and shocking acts conducted by gore groups such as 764 and those engaged in sextortion.

Two of the three bills that I introduced today will address these offenders. My first bill called Ending Coercion of Children and Harm Online, ECCHO for short, will address the horrific conduct that these gore groups do when they target children to commit violent acts like injuries to animals, self-harm, and suicide. The second bill, called the Stop Sextortion Act, will hold these people who engage in online threatening acts of sextortion toward children accountable under the same law which addresses child sexual abuse material.

Finally, when offenders are convicted of child sex abuse material offenses, less than one-third of the cases are sentenced within the current sentencing guidelines. Simply put then, the current sentencing guidelines are outdated and disregarded by most Federal judges because they do not adequately account for common offenders' characteristics that differentiate the bad from the worst online child exploiters. That bill has the title Sentencing Accountability for Exploitation, or the SAFE Act. It will require the Sentencing Commission to draft and revise the child sexual abuse material guidelines to include many of the aggravating factors we now see with today's online offenders. Those factors include encryption or other masking techniques were used or whether the offender was part of an online group to commit the offense, just to name a few. This bill will provide the much-needed guidance to the Sentencing Commission of our Government to overhaul the child sexual abuse material guidelines in a meaningful way to distinguish offender behavior.

Now to Senator Durbin, Ranking Member.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD J. DURBIN,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

Senator DURBIN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and glad you are holding this hearing. And the fact that you have held this hearing and we had similar hearings when I Chaired the Committee I think is a message to all who are following us this is bipartisan, and it should be, start to finish.

And we have a real task ahead of us. As Senator Grassley describes the legislation that is pending, I can recall the hearing for Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, and one of the big issues brought up over and over again were the use of sentencing

guidelines for abuses in this area that were written so long ago they didn't reflect the reality of the extortion which is going on today.

And judges of the most conservative political stripe and the most liberal political stripe were reaching the same conclusion, that those guidelines just don't work anymore. They were counting offenses by the number of images. Well, that might have made sense when we were talking about 8X10 photographs. It makes no sense when we are talking about technology of today and the videos that are involved. So we have got to update that and show the reality of the situation, and I think that is something we can all work on together.

I learned something else. We would get unanimous votes in this Committee, if you remember, right? Republicans and Democrats would both be voting for the legislation that we think would change things for the better. And then it disappeared, disappeared between the Committee and the floor. And the same is happening now. We make great speeches here. We sometimes enact great laws in the Committee.

But when it comes to taking them to the floor, to enact them on the floor and eventually send them over to the House, we drop them all completely. That has got to end. There is no reason for that. To invite these witnesses, as compelling as they are, and then to ignore their testimony when it comes to executing on the floor is unacceptable. Let's kind of decide at this point that if you are going to have the nerve to give a speech here on the subject, you ought to have the nerve to do it on the floor and do it repeatedly. So let's have a sense of urgency in what we are setting out to do.

I work with Senator Hawley, in fact, many others, too—survivors, law enforcement, advocates—to put together the STOP CSAM Act. The bill takes a comprehensive approach to stemming the tide of online child exploitation. I have repeatedly said we must bring the same sense of urgency to protecting kids in the virtual world that we do in the real world.

But the landscape of online child exploitation is changing dramatically by the day. Two trends in particular demand our attention, financially motivated sextortion and sadistic online exploitation. What once was rare is now epidemic. In 2021, NCMEC, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, received a total of 139 cyber tips involving financially motivated sextortion, 2021, 139 tips. In the first 6 months of this year alone, they have already received 23,000 of these tips, plus. Offenders often operated in coordinated criminal networks overseas, targeting teenagers in the United States, and we will hear specific cases about that. They coerce them into sending a sexually explicit image and then threaten to release it unless money is paid.

For too many families, this crime ends in tragedy. NCMEC has identified more than 36 young men in the United States who have died by suicide after being sextorted. We are joined by one of those families. I said hello to Mrs. Woods and thanked her for being here. But she lost her son, James, at 17 years old when he was targeted. She is here in a courageous capacity, and thank you for being here, transforming unbearable loss into call for action. That photograph of your son in his track outfit in front of the hurdles tells the story.

I am sure he was a wonderful young man and you cherish his memory by being here today.

Another disturbing trend is a rise in offenders who do not just view or trade images of abuse but direct real-time torture, encourage escalating violence, groom children to produce CSAM and self-harm videos. NCMEC has identified this behavior as sadistic online exploitation. The threat is accelerating. The numbers tell the story.

This is an unacceptable systemic failure, and what are we going to do about it? We are going to have a hearing. We are going to call witnesses. We are going to lament the situation. What are we going to do about it? Is there going to be a bill in the new session to say that we are so overwhelmed with legislation on the floor we don't have time is a joke. Watch the Senate and tell me that we don't have the time to take this up. We have more than enough time to do it right.

This Committee has a history of tackling the tough issues. Mr. Chairman, it is up to you and me and those Senators on both sides of the aisle to make it happen. Thank you.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you.

Now, I am going to introduce our witnesses. We will hear from them, and then we will have questions. Ms. Tamia Woods and her husband Tim are parents of James Woods. James was a good student, year-round track and field athlete. At 17, James tragically took his own life November 2022 after being extorted by someone online for \$300. James had sent the online abuser a compromising video of himself and was threatened with being exposed by the person if James didn't pay the \$300 ransom.

Mrs. Woods and her husband are the founders of the Do It for James Foundation. The mission of the foundation is to create awareness for kids and their families to prevent similar tragedies. We thank you, Mrs. Woods, for being here to share a heartbreaking story.

Jessica Smolar is a former assistant U.S. attorney in the Western District of Pennsylvania. With 30 years' experience there, Ms. Smolar handled a variety of criminal cases, including cases involving child sexual abuse material, child exploitation, and cybercrime and national security. Ms. Smolar has received several Department of Justice and law enforcement awards for her work as an assistant U.S. attorney, including 2022 Attorney General's Distinguished Service Award and the United States Attorney's Victim's Advocate Award for dedication and extraordinary contributions in the service of victims.

Lauren Coffren is executive director of the Exploited Children's Division of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. She has been employed for over 20 years with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, serving in various roles. Ms. Coffren oversees the Exploited Children's Division, which operates several programs, including the CyberTipline and Child Victim Identification Program. In addition, Ms. Coffren started the CSAM Survivors Services Program, working to improve the responses to survivors of child sexual abuse material.

We welcome all of you here today, and it is our tradition to ask you to stand and swear to this oath.

[Witnesses are sworn in.]

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you all very much. They all affirmatively responded.

Now, we will start with Mrs. Woods. And don't forget to push the button on your——

Ms. WOODS. Yes, sir.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Proceed.

**STATEMENT OF TAMIA WOODS, CO-FOUNDER,
DO IT FOR JAMES FOUNDATION, STREETSBORO, OH**

Ms. WOODS. Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and Committee Members, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Tamia Woods, and I speak on the behalf of myself, my husband, Tim, and for our beautiful child, James Timothy Woods, forever age 17. I stand before you as a mother whose only child was taken by something so preventable, so cruel, and so ignored that it should shake every person in this room to their core.

One of the messages sent to my son, "I am more determined to rot your life than to make it a waste, a trash can, a shame, a dishonor, a hell, a real disaster, a hell on earth, and I remind you that I am heartless. I have no pity to rot a life as well as yours." This was one of almost 200 messages sent to my child over the span of 19½ hours between November 18 and 19, 2022.

James was the victim of financial sextortion, and though he died by suicide, let me be clear, he was murdered.

James was a beautiful young man with a soul like gold and a smile that would light up any room. He would give you the shirt off his back. He could figure out anything. He was witty, thoughtful, kind, and loved chess.

James was a high school senior. He wanted to major in pre-law, and he was months away from breaking a 40-year-old school record in the 110 hurdles. Every time I speak of him, I smile because I am grateful God let me borrow his angel for 17½ years, but every day I am angry. A woman online befriended James on Instagram. She created what every predator knows how to build, a safe space. She made him feel comfortable, seen, liked. She groomed him. Then she asked if he wanted to see her unclothed and exposed herself. She asked him to do the same, and like any innocent 17-year-old boy who liked a girl and saw no danger, he did. That moment she created became their weapon.

The attackers came, not one person, but what we believe, at least four. For nearly 20 hours, they attacked, threatened, terrorized, dismantled my child. Every time he tried to fight back and ask, why are you doing this to me, please leave me alone, they escalated, sending his image to friends and family, telling him he would be labeled a pedophile, telling him his future was over, telling him you should just kill yourself. And in those last moments, my son, who had everything to live for, felt like he had no other choice.

A day that started with laughter, college friends, and joy ended with my husband finding our child unalive in our home in the middle of the day. No parent should ever enter a room and see that. I stand here because 19½ hours is not a short time in the digital world. It is a lifetime. It is enough time for someone to intervene, to flag an account, to cancel messages, to report this behavior. Yet

no one stepped in, no system protecting him, no platform stopped it.

So my husband and I created the Do It For James Foundation, and since the day that James has died, we dedicated our lives to speaking out, teaching, and fighting so that no other parent feels the pain that sits in our heart every single moment of every single day.

Large corporations continue to argue for rights while refusing to take responsibility. We are asking you to put laws in place that give us multiple avenues to protect our kids because parental controls alone are not enough. Click here to opt out at age 13 is not protection. Predators thrive when the risk is low but reward is high. Criminals are making billions by exploiting our children because we tell our parents, monitor your kids better, while platforms refuse to monitor predators at all. How dare we lay blame on the victims while criminals walk free.

Today, instead of checking on James' homework, instead of mailing him care packages to his college dorm, instead of cheering him on for track meets, I hold a picture, a picture of my son's photos that he never had a chance to see because that is all I have left, 17½ memories—17½ years of memories but no new ones.

So I am begging you to stand with us, stand up, do something, help us save lives. We may not be able to save them all, but with the right laws, with accountability, with real consequences, we can make it harder for predators to win. We can make it harder for another parent to bury their child. Please do it for James. Do it for every child whose name we never got a chance to learn.

Thank you. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Woods appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman GRASSLEY [off mic]. God bless you. Thank you. Mrs. Smolar.

STATEMENT OF JESSICA LIEBER SMOLAR, ESQ., FORMER ASSISTANT U.S. ATTORNEY, WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, PITTSBURGH, PA

Ms. SMOLAR. Good morning, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify here today. My name is Jessica Lieber Smolar, and I had the honor of serving as an assistant United States attorney in the Western District of Pennsylvania for three decades. During my career as a Federal prosecutor, I personally handled and oversaw hundreds of child exploitation and human trafficking investigations and prosecutions. When I first began prosecuting these offenses, investigations often centered around physical evidence and traditional mail-based exchanges.

Over time, I witnessed a monumental shift in the types of child sexual abuse material, also referred to as CSAM, that offenders collected, as well as their methods of collection. This shift was not limited to the sheer volume and disturbing nature of the material. It also encompassed the tools offenders used to acquire, share, and conceal CSAM.

Today, every child exploitation case involves the criminal use of cellular phones and computers. Offenders use these tools to stock-

pile massive quantities of sexually explicit videos and images of children, frequently targeting prepubescent children. Violent depictions of infants and toddlers being sexually exploited were routinely collected by the defendants whom I prosecuted.

Offenders also increasingly used advanced technology and platforms for CSAM trafficking. They congregate in online communities and darknet forums solely devoted to child exploitation. They can now more easily conceal their crimes and their identities through encryption, VPNs, the darknet, and remote erasure software.

The law has not kept pace with the rapid technological advances or evolving sex offender behavior. United States Sentencing Guidelines, Section 2G2.2, was designed when CSAM was distributed by mail, so it adds offense enhancements for actions common to all CSAM offenders today, like using a computer, possessing images of prepubescent minors, or amassing many images. The guideline enhancements apply broadly and no longer reflect varying levels of offender culpability or risk. Legislation is needed to amend the CSAM guidelines.

The Sentencing Commission's June 2021 report found that Section 2G2 is outdated, leading judges to exercise their discretion to reduce sentences for child sexual offenders. The commission's data for Fiscal Year 2019 showed that less than 30 percent of non-production child pornography offenders were sentenced within the recommended guidelines. This statistic reflects broad judicial dissatisfaction and leads to inconsistent sentencing nationwide. As Federal prosecutors, my colleagues and I often considered plea offers to binding sentences to avoid the application of the insufficient sentencing guidelines and sentencing disparities.

There are also emerging crimes that are not fully covered by existing criminal statutes, such as those committed by members of the violent online network 764. The 764 members befriend children sometimes as young as 9 years old through popular online platforms and then coerce them into escalating sexual, self-destructive, and violent behavior, compelling victims to document sex acts, harm siblings and family pets, cut and mutilate themselves, or attempt suicide.

There are no Federal statutes that adequately criminalize the coercive conduct of 764 and similar groups. As Federal prosecutors, we focused on proving more conventional statutory violations, like CSAM possession or production, or distribution of obscenity to minors to effectively prosecute these horrific crimes.

Similarly, law enforcement agencies have reported an alarming increase in sextortion cases, children being coerced into sending sexually explicit images online, like James that we just heard about. Perpetrators engage victims in flirtatious conversations on social media and gaming platforms where they feel comfortable to obtain explicit images. The offenders then use the sexually compromising images to blackmail victims for more images, or in the case of financial extortion, for money or gift cards. They threaten to widely publicize the image to the child's friends and family. Children suffer severe emotional distress as a result of such sexual extortion, and too many have engaged in self-harm or suicide. As Federal prosecutors, we found it challenging to effectively charge

sextortion and financial sextortion. Existing statutes do not adequately address the full scope or severe harm of these crimes.

Increasing public understanding of the evolving and destructive risk to children online is crucial. Legislation is needed to strengthen the legal framework and better support those responsible for protecting children.

I welcome your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Smolar appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman GRASSLEY [off mic]. Thank you, Ms. Smolar.

Now, Ms. Coffren.

**STATEMENT OF LAUREN COFFREN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
EXPLOITED CHILDREN DIVISION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR
MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN, ALEXANDRIA, VA**

Ms. COFFREN. Good morning, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and Members of the Committee. My name is Lauren Coffren, and I am the executive director of the Exploited Children Division at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, or NCMEC. NCMEC is a nonprofit organization created in 1984 by child advocates to help find missing children, reduce child exploitation, and prevent child victimization, and I'm honored to be here today in order to share NCMEC's perspective on evolving online child sexual exploitation crimes.

NCMEC is congressionally designated to operate 16 programs related to missing and exploited children's issues. One of NCMEC's core programs is the CyberTipline, the centralized mechanism for the public and online platforms to report incidents of child sexual exploitation. Through its work with the CyberTipline, NCMEC has seen children sexually exploited online for decades.

Today, we are confronting alarming rates of emerging crimes where sexually exploiting a child is not the final objective but a means of achieving a larger goal of financial gain or incitement of chaos. NCMEC shares this Committee's deep concern that offenders will continue to evolve and escalate their exploitation of children online unless we act now to hold online platforms accountable when they facilitate a child's exploitation to ensure safety by design is incorporated into development of new technology.

Today, I'd like to share NCMEC's insights about three especially alarming new trends on how children are being sexually exploited online. One of the newest trends I'd like to highlight is related to online enticement where reports grew by 192 percent last year. Specifically, we continue to see a rise in financial sextortion, where an offender blackmails a child for money or gift cards in exchange for not distributing nude or sexual images of the child. Unlike offenders who are normally sexually motivated, these offenders are driven by financial gain.

As we heard from Tamia Woods just a few moments ago, this crime targets teenage boys, and too often, the outcomes are tragic. High-performing boys with large social circles like James are becoming victims of coerced suicide as a result of this crime. Offenders use incessant aggressive threats of public exposure, shame, arrest, as if the target—if the targeted boys fail to comply with the escalating demands for money.

The second trend NCMEC has identified in the past year is sadistic online exploitation. This trend has led to the most egregious exploitation that NCMEC has ever seen. Violent online offenders work in groups, targeting and manipulating vulnerable children, some as young as 12 years old, on popular online platforms and gaming sites to create and share sexually explicit content, to cut themselves, carving offenders' names into their bodies, to harm, to kill animals, to physically or sexually abuse other children, including their younger siblings, and even to commit suicide. These offenders lure children into online relationships, then terrorize them with rapid-fire threats to kill the child's family or disclose personal information if they don't comply with their demands. Reports of these brutal victimizations grew by 200 percent last year and continue rising.

The third trend I'd like to note today is the use of generative artificial intelligence, or GAI, to sexually exploit children. NCMEC believes we are just beginning to see the true impact of GAI on child sexual exploitation. Offenders use GAI to create new sexually abusive content, to alter known child sexual abuse images, to nudity images of children, and to chat about how to entice and exploit children. In the first half of this year, NCMEC received over 440,000 reports connected to GAI, and we expect to have over 1 million reports by the end of this year.

These three trends tragically affirm that online offenders are using evolving technology to exploit children in new and more extreme ways. This exploitation will not stop until Congress passes laws that close legal gaps, incentivizes companies to adopt safety by design, and provide essential tools to better protect children. NCMEC appreciates that Congress acted decisively to pass laws like the REPORT Act and the TAKE IT DOWN Act, and supporting newly introduced bills like STOP CSAM Act, ENFORCE Act, the Safe Cloud Storage Act, and the GUARD Act. We need to ensure that these pending bills are passed, and our laws to protect children keep pace with the technological advances.

Thank you for allowing NCMEC to share our insights with you today. We look forward to continuing our work with this Committee to share information, to craft legislative solutions, and to keep children safer online.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Coffren appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman GRASSLEY. Before I start my line of questions, I would like to enter into the record these [off mic] children have committed suicide and were also people that were severely harmed because of sextortion in online groups like 764. Is there any objection?

[No response.]

Chairman GRASSLEY. I hear none, so that will be done.

[The information appears as a submission for the record.]

Mrs. Woods, I am going to start with you. Recently, there have been several news reports of increased sextortion cases and how quickly bad actors can manipulate children into sending sexual images and then engage in a campaign to threaten toward the children, placing them in impossible situations. Many of those children think that suicide is the answer. You have promoted changes in various State laws to make sextortion illegal after the tragedy of

your son. From a parent's point of view, why is it important to make these sextortion illegal under Federal law?

Ms. WOODS. Well, a number of things. First of all, we have to look at sextortion like what it is. It is our children are being sexually exploited. They are a sexually assaulted victim. And most people in general never speak out. Less than 30 percent actually speak out about being victimized. We have to make sure that not only our children see that we have their backs on these issues, but we have to make sure that they know that there are resources and laws that back them up as well. Our kids need to know that.

And James never spoke to anyone. He had a wonderful, wonderful community that had his back, but yet he never spoke up. And so it's laws like this that would back our children and influence them to speak up and let them know that they're being victimized.

And people need to be held accountable on top of that. They need to know that they're—they shouldn't be comfortable with doing the things that they're doing. Right now, they're comfortable, and you see more and more people being victimized because of that.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you.

Ms. Coffren, you have been with the center for 20 years in a variety of positions involving online child safety. Describe the recent trends involving these violent gore groups like 764 and how they operate and target children online.

Ms. COFFREN. Thank you so much for your question. These sadistic online exploitation, violent online groups, they go by various names here that we've heard them referenced as, but most often, they're motivated purely by chaos. Their goal is to be able to take the—weaponizing our Nation's children to be able to create terror, to be able to show just how harmful they can be. And they do that oftentimes by seeking out to target the most vulnerable, children who may already be demonstrating mental health issues, who may be indicating that they have thoughts of self-harm, perhaps eating disorders.

Those children may be looking for solace, for comfort, for advice in online platforms and spaces where they can find a community. And unfortunately, these offenders are infiltrating and targeting those communities to be able to create relationships with those children and then to be able to push boundaries, to test them, to see if they can hold up a sign with their name on it, maybe hold up a sign with a signal or a logo. And by doing this, they're testing those boundaries to see how far they can push that child. Can they get them to put their name on their body? Can they get them to carve the name into the body?

And unfortunately, that incrementalization can often lead to really tragic results. Each step along the way can be weaponized against that child. And what we often see is a swarming kind of effect where multiple offenders will go after the same child at one point in time.

The imagery, the videos, the chats that we are seeing and reading are the most graphic that I have ever seen in my 20-year history. We are hearing from law enforcement out in the field who have said that this is the most disturbing content as well. So you're talking about seasoned professionals who are really meeting their

match with the new and evolving types of exploitation that we are seeing.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Yes. Ms. Smolar, I am going to forget my lead in. I want to get to the question because my time is running out. Could you share why we need Federal legislation specifically to address these gore groups and other individuals who engage in sextortion? Share your experiences with us in working with investigations involving these groups.

Ms. SMOLAR. Thank you, Senator.

Senator DURBIN. Your microphone.

Ms. SMOLAR. I apologize.

Congress has already provided so many important tools to those of us in the field like mandatory minimums for crimes like receipt and distribution of child pornography or production. We need those tools in order to properly hold these type of defendants accountable. Right now, when we charge crimes like sextortion or 764, across the country, we all charge them differently. Sometimes we charge them as online threats. Sometimes if we are lucky, we find CSAM and we charge them that way. There's no consistency that allows us to properly address the specific harm that these actors are committing.

In addition, a lot of these actors are overseas, and it would be extremely helpful for those of us who want to extradite people here to the United States to hold them accountable to have a felony statute that specifically speaks to this harm.

I'm familiar with a case where a defendant was in Germany, and Germany had a coercion to harm statute, but we did not. They were able to charge that 764 offender there. We could not charge him here. That's—that shouldn't happen. We should be able to charge these offenders, hold them accountable, and deter them from continuing to hurt our children.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thanks, all three of you. Senator Durbin.

Senator DURBIN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Smolar, we have considered the issue you raised in your testimony so many times, so many different ways because it can be characterized by some that if you don't follow the strict sentencing guidelines, that you are soft on crime, that you really don't care enough to impose the adequate sentence. What you tell us is less than 30 percent of non-production child pornography offenders were sentenced within the recommended guidelines, reflecting broad judicial satisfaction, 70 percent, and inconsistent sentencing nationwide.

You say, "As Federal prosecutors, my colleagues and I often considered plea offers to binding sentences to avoid the application of the insufficient sentencing guidelines and disparities." Tell me a little more. What are you talking about here?

Ms. SMOLAR. Especially in cases where you're talking about, for example, possession of CSAM where there's no mandatory minimum sentence, oftentimes, my colleagues and I—and not just in the Western District of Pennsylvania, but nationwide—would see sentences that we felt were insufficient. When you're talking about possession of CSAM, you are talking about a real child being harmed in the most serious way possible. And I personally believe that sentences for people who are collecting that type of material

should be significant in order to protect victims and to deter others from collecting it. So it's important that the sentencing guidelines are useful to judges.

Senator DURBIN. I understand part of the problem was a numeric issue.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. Initially, so many instances of objects that a person had led to a certain sentencing guideline, but now that they are being collected in video form or in different technology form—

Ms. SMOLAR. Right.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. The counting numbers really doesn't tell the story. Is that your impression?

Ms. SMOLAR. It doesn't. All we were—we're talking about math. It's not about math. These are about real offenders and culpability and risk. For example, what you're referring to is one image—one video is 75 images under the sentencing guidelines. You start adding up videos to try to get to 600 images, and you get a 5-point enhancement. Use of a computer is a 2-point enhancement. Pre-pubescent children, 2-point enhancement. That doesn't really tell the story of these offenders and how dangerous they potentially are.

So legislation will be needed to address, are they on specific darknet forums talking about how to abuse children? Are they using multiple platforms to try to get to children or to share this material? Are they—how severe are the images and how many victims are in them? That is not necessarily encompassed by the sentencing guidelines right now, so legislation is needed to address offender risk.

Senator DURBIN. Ms. Coffren, I was interested with the Chairman's question that you responded that sometimes the object of this exploitation is chaos. It is not financial. Tell me a little more on that. What is the value of this perpetrator wasting all of these hours leading to the self-harm of a young person or worse?

Ms. COFFREN. Right. What we are—thank you so much for that question, Senator. What we are seeing is these loosely coordinated groups that you've been referencing like 764 and some of these other that we're referencing as sadistic online are fueled and motivated by being able to have clout notoriety for the impact of their actions. This means it extends much more beyond just CSAM. It is how can they use children to harm themselves or the others and then harm the community as well. So we also see children being coerced into planning school shootings or threatening their communities as well that are also offshoots of this type of work.

So child sexual exploitation has actually been hijacked as one methodology for a larger way of trying to be able to use children against the community and for shock and for awe. The more that we talk about this, unfortunately, we feed their desire for that notoriety for the impact that they're having, and these sometimes called nihilistic violent groups as well is really fueled by something that we are just not that familiar with operating with, which is pure chaos.

Senator DURBIN. Ms. Woods, how long do you think your son was being exploited before he finally lost his life?

Ms. WOODS. It was 19½ hours. He received 200 messages in 19½ hours with what we believe four different people attacking him at one time.

Senator DURBIN. Do you have any idea where the source of these attacks goes?

Ms. WOODS. His murderers are in Ivory Coast. And we of course don't have—we—we're told we'll never receive justice for James.

Senator DURBIN. I am so sorry for that.

Ms. WOODS. Thank you.

Senator DURBIN. Thank you for being here, all three of you.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you, Senator Durbin. Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for yet another very emotional hearing about a topic that we constantly talk about and do little about.

I am perplexed. I can understand having differences on healthcare and taxes and you name it, we have a different—all of us agree on this pretty much. What is going on in the Senate and the House where no matter who is in charge, nothing really happens? I said this when I was Chairman.

So here we are in 2025. This 764 group—how do you say your last name?

Ms. SMOLAR. Smolar.

Senator GRAHAM. So I want to acknowledge the FBI and the District of Columbia U.S. Attorney's Office brought a case against two people. Are you all familiar with that? That is a good start, right? Kash Patel is focused on this group. Should they be domestic terrorists under U.S. law?

Ms. SMOLAR. It's a good question, Senator. I can tell you even within the FBI, there are cross-programmatic focuses on this group because—

Senator GRAHAM. I mean, do you think they should be domestic terrorists? If these people are not domestic terrorists, who would be?

Ms. SMOLAR. A lot of—

Senator GRAHAM. You all both just told us that they are trying to bring down society by harming our children and exploiting them. Why shouldn't they be domestic terrorists?

Ms. SMOLAR. I do know that they have been charged in at least one case as domestic terrorists.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, I would like to put a list. Ms. Coffren, are you okay with making this group domestic terrorists?

Ms. COFFREN. I think when we're looking at how individuals are weaponizing our children, a lot more research needs to be done.

Senator GRAHAM. Not really. No, not really.

Ms. COFFREN. Certainly—

Senator GRAHAM. No. This phone, do you think it is a dangerous product for children, Ms. Woods?

[Holds up cell phone.]

Ms. WOODS. Yes, I do. And to answer—

Senator GRAHAM. What is more dangerous, smoking or this?

Ms. WOODS. Oh, the phone, of course.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with that?

Ms. SMOLAR. I do.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with that?

Ms. COFFREN. Without a doubt.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Well, I am not urging people to smoke. I don't think kids should smoke.

Why don't we label this a dangerous product and at least inform consumers better? Do you agree that is a good idea?

Ms. WOODS. I agree.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. There are so many good ideas, and I want to compliment this Committee, who is awfully divided, for coming up with one good idea after another from, you know, Senator Hawley, Blackburn, all of us, Cornyn, everybody is working together. Nobody has been better on this than Senator Durbin.

So February is the 30th anniversary of Section 230. Are you familiar with Section 230? Ms. Woods, are you familiar with it?

Ms. WOODS. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. You really can't sue anybody that was involved in helping these people murder your son, can you?

Ms. WOODS. No.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you all agree that it is time to revisit Section 230?

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Ms. COFFREN. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you believe it is time to open the courtrooms to people who have been harmed by this behavior?

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Ms. COFFREN. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree that Section 230 gives a legal pass on the most bizarre, harmful behavior in the country, and 30 years later, we should revisit Section 230?

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Ms. COFFREN. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Me too. So what are we going to do? Here is what I am going to do. I am going to write a letter to Senator Thune and Senator Schumer, both good men, and in February, we should have like a social media week where we take all these good ideas and we dedicate a week or 2 weeks to doing nothing on the floor but this, to try to take these laws that everybody coming up with and put them in a big package and put us all on record as are we all talk, or are we willing to act? Do you all like that idea?

Ms. WOODS. I sure do.

Ms. COFFREN. Great idea.

Senator GRAHAM. We will have like a couple of months to let the country know, tune in in February, we are going to do some things to protect your children and see where the Senate is on this. Would you support that idea?

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Ms. COFFREN. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay, good. So I would like my colleagues to think creatively what should be on that list, but come February on the 30th anniversary of Section 230, I would like to have an effort

on the floor of the Senate to deal with the dark side of Section 230. So I think that would be very, very helpful.

Now, the cost of doing business, do you agree with me the more likely you are to go to jail, a lot of people avoid that area?

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with me that the more likely you are to get sued if you put out a bad product, the more likely you are to try to change that product?

Ms. COFFREN. Yes.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you all agree that we have, as a Nation, miserably failed our children, that we have hearings and we talk and we have done very little to protect them as of this date?

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes.

Ms. COFFREN. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. That is a damning indictment of all of us. Thank you.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our panel for testifying.

And Ms. Woods, our hearts go out to you for the tragic loss of your son.

As I look at this issue, and as mentioned by my colleagues, that we have been wrestling with child exploitation, which is only getting worse. It is not getting any better. It is getting worse and acknowledged by all of us the sense of frustration because this is actually an issue that receives bipartisan focus and a desire on our part to do more than what we have done so far. And I am looking at this issue by way of focusing on, I think there is a prevention aspect to it. There is a prosecution aspect to it. And as Ms. Smolar says, you know, the laws have not kept up with all of the kinds of ways that these exploiters coming up to evade prosecution, so there is a prosecution part.

And then I would say there is a civil remedies part, which is really looking at Section 230 and removing the kind of total immunity that Section 230 provides.

So if I look at the prevention side, what can we do to prevent the kind of tragedy that overtook James?

Ms. WOODS. So it's a number of things. I will say from the Do It For James Foundation, over the last 3 years, we averaged less than \$10,000 in grants. We're not getting approved to even do the prevention. It's all on the backs—my husband and I have given hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to make sure that we do so. That's one.

Two, we have to make this a demand to talk about it in schools. My husband and I have talked to well over 200,000 children. And because we made them aware of something they knew about but didn't know quite it was illegal, nor did they know what it was called, it led to four arrests and two being investigated and hundreds of kids being saved by dying by suicide.

So we have to make sure that not only are you all educated, not only are law enforcement agents educated, but also our children need to be included in this education so that we know what to do if we were ever presented by these murderers out there, that we can let the kids know that they need to call NCMEC and make sure that they have references that they need and resources.

Senator HIRONO. I couldn't agree with you more because it is the children who are being targeted for exploitation. And if our children are not aware that if this happens to them and they are targeted, that there are places to go, that they ought to inform because I would think that if you are a child and you are the target, you don't want to talk about it. You are trying to hide it, whatever is happening.

So would the three of you agree that we need to do a lot better to get the communities and the children much more able to call out what is happening to them? And what is it that we need to do? Do we provide grants to the Department of Justice and make sure that both DOJ and Homeland Security pay attention to these horrible crimes that are happening? And rather than focusing so much of their resources on immigration, that they ought to—DOJ and Homeland Security should have the resources to go after this kind of exploitation.

But I just wanted to get the sense from all three of you, you know, what specifically should we be doing on the prevention side of the scale? And then for Ms. Smolar to tell us what we can do to provide law enforcement the better tools to prosecute these crimes. So do you want to share some of your—grants to organizations, yes. Any other ideas on the prevention side?

Ms. SMOLAR. Sorry. Thank you, Senator. In addition—we can't prosecute our way out of this. That is clear. We do need the tools to be able to properly prosecute these crimes, but education is key. I can't tell you how many people I told I was coming here today to talk about 764 and they look at me blankly. They don't know what it is. We need more public education of children, teachers, coaches, clergy, people who interact with children who could maybe look at their arms, see if there are strange cuts, see if they look different, if they're acting differently.

PSAs are important. FBI has issued a number of PSAs on this group, but I don't even think that's enough. We need more public education in the schools, in the places where children congregate so that they are not afraid to come forward and report these crimes.

Senator HIRONO. Ms. Coffren.

Ms. COFFREN. Prevention is also detection. So what we need to be able to see is companies able to detect some of these keywords that are happening in chats, flagging for that, making the kinds of reports, allowing law enforcement to investigate this before those offenders are able to go on, create new profiles, and blackmail, sextort, or coerce other children. So I think taking a look, too, as well as to updating some of the guidelines around what it takes to report. Are technology companies required to be transparent about what it is that they're doing behind the scenes as well? All of those efforts can actually help to save lives if we know what steps are being taken behind the scenes.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Now, Senator Cornyn.

Senator CORNYN. Thank you all for being here. This is the third hearing we have had on this topic, and I am appreciative of the Chairman and for scheduling it. But it strikes me we need to actually do something, do something more.

The problem is, Ms. Smolar, you mentioned all the different sources of this information, CSAM and others, including the dark web. But as you just said, we can't prosecute ourselves out of this. Senator Graham said, well, maybe we ought to create an opportunity to sue. But could you just briefly describe the challenges, including international sources of this information and jurisdictional and other legal constraints that make that impractical?

Ms. SMOLAR. There are a lot of challenges in handling these cases. The darknet, VPNs, the smarter, more sophisticated offenders are able to hide their identities through encryption and through VPNs. So it is a huge challenge for law enforcement to identify the perpetrators here.

In addition, resources is always a problem. International offenders is an issue. You know, we had international offenders in a lot of the cybercrime cases that I handled, and we would get together with law enforcement in many, many countries and discuss these matters. That doesn't always happen in this area, and it's something that should because these crimes are international in scope. These offenders are coming from outside the U.S. a lot of—

Senator CORNYN. Well, Ms. Woods, you said your son's murderer was from Africa?

Ms. WOODS. Yes, Ivory Coast. And we don't have an extradition treaty. They stated that they'll never hand over any of their natural born citizens.

Senator CORNYN. Well, it seems to me like we are trying to play catchup, but the technology and the bad guys are outpacing us at almost every turn. And, of course, I know Senator Hawley has a bill to deal with chatbots, but just to folks who are not familiar with that name, these are—this is technology that simulates human interaction, so somebody actually thinks that they are talking, perhaps, to a human being. And we can only imagine the uses to which that technology could be put to damage our children or cause them to hurt themselves or take their lives.

So Australia has passed a law that says that children under the age of 16 can't get access to social media accounts. What do you think about that, Ms. Woods?

Ms. WOODS. Well, I would like to say that we—

Senator CORNYN. I know your son was 17, but—

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Senator CORNYN [continuing]. Do you think it would help?

Ms. WOODS. Oh, yes, yes. I think that we—first of all, Tim and I did an article for Australia in 2023 when our son passed, and they didn't have the actual law in place. Since then, they made sure that they had a law. Even though our son was 17 years of age, we have to look at the—we allowed him to be online before that age. And what if we would have had these laws in place? It would have still made a difference. And even though we lost our only

child, that doesn't mean that I'm not going to stand here and stand up for anybody else's kids——

Senator CORNYN. Of course.

Ms. WOODS [continuing]. Because you all's kids are my kids——

Senator CORNYN. Of course.

Ms. WOODS [continuing]. So I'm going to make sure that things get done.

Senator CORNYN. Well, God bless you for doing that.

Ms. WOODS. Thank you.

Senator CORNYN. Ms. Coffren, NCMEC has been the leader in this area when it comes to child exploitation. Do you think that Congress should consider a law banning the use of social media for children 16 and younger?

Ms. COFFREN. Certainly, that is one tool that would be kind of in the arsenal of being able to address this. I think we have to look at the different types of age restrictions, age assurances, age gating. There's an awful lot of complexity that goes around into that, and so we need to be able to look at ways of holding the social media companies and online platforms responsible, as well as the device or the app stores, as well as ensuring that there's better parental controls. We see——

Senator CORNYN. Well, they have got technology that I just barely struggle to understand. And certainly, they would be in the best position, would they not, Ms. Smolar, to know what is happening on their own platforms?

Ms. SMOLAR. Correct. Although I will state that in a lot of these crimes, the offenders will find a child, for example, on Snapchat or Instagram, but then they will move them to a different application like Signal where we have no control over that.

Senator CORNYN. Ms. Coffren, if Senator Grassley will allow me, you mentioned something that intrigued me when you said some of these platforms—some of the information or some of these individuals are inciting to chaos. What did you mean by that?

Ms. COFFREN. So they're motivated purely by a goal, not sexual exploitation of a child. They are not the traditional, you know, pedophile that we might think about. Their goal is to cause disruption in our communities, to have us holding hearings today talking about just how difficult it is to think about our children being harmed for shock and for awe.

And so when that is the new type of offender, we need new types of tools. Looking at the types of signals that exist on the social media platforms, the chats, how people are operating is going to be really essential to try to stay current to these kind of evolving statuses of new offenders and new motivations.

Senator CORNYN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you. Senator Blackburn.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And as I spoke with each of the three of you earlier, I am just so grateful for your work, for your commitment, and your willingness to talk about this. And it has been so interesting to me as someone who has worked to protect children and to really focus on what was happening with technology and in this virtual space. And it is astounding to me that there are laws in the physical space that protect children. You cannot endanger a child. You can't sell

them alcohol. You can't sell them tobacco. You cannot expose them to pornography. If you were a liquor store and you were selling to kids, they would padlock your store and take away your license.

But in the virtual space, our children are vulnerable 24/7, 365. And I think during the COVID pandemic, many parents realized what was happening with the phone and their child. That is why you are seeing bell to bell, no phones in schools. That is why you are seeing other laws take place.

And Ms. Woods, as I said to you, I am just heartbroken for you. As a mother and a grandmother and having teenage grandsons, this is a fear, an absolute fear that parents have because the sextortion schemes and the targeting of young boys, it's like something that happens within a matter of hours and days.

And I appreciated your comment about your son being murdered. He was targeted, and then he was literally cyber bullied to death.

And this is why we need to pass the Kids Online Safety Act. This is why my REPORT Act—and Ms. Coffren, you mentioned that—was signed into law. And more needs to be done to protect children in the virtual space.

Ms. Woods, I want to come to you and just give you a minute to talk about why these platforms should be required to force safety by design and to put that burden on these social media platforms to root out these bad actors.

Ms. WOODS. Yes, so there is a number of things that I would like to say with that. First of all, social media and different applications actually, I say, save face. So they say that they have parental controls, but did anyone know that on Google, if your child is 12 years old and once they turn 13, Google directly messages your child and tells them that they no longer need parental control and they can click here to opt out. That's what I mean by parental controls are not enough. You—we are put at a—and made to have a responsibility as parents to protect our children in every way, and yet there's other obstacles involved that intervene in us parenting our child in the most appropriate way.

The other thing too is that by social media actually making sure that we have laws in place like the social media act, parental act, is making sure that our—we can monitor our kids better, but when there is acronyms like—when my son said, "I'm going to kill myself," it would have alerted me. It would have alerted any parent that had lost their children's lives. And it would have told me something's wrong. I wish that even today, 3 years later, that I would have known half of the things that I would have had or even be put in a position where I could have taught my son to come to us in certain manners. He came to us for whatever, if there was a hole in his sack, whatever he needed. But yet our social media platforms took the time to not say anything.

Senator BLACKBURN. So what advice would you give to parents right now, sitting there today, parents of teens?

Ms. WOODS. My advice that I would give to parents is to talk to your children about sextortion and any other child exploitation. I knew nothing about it. Every parent that lives here today that has a child has a privilege I did not have. It is free. Let's talk about it. Let's educate our children. And what I would say to children is be vulnerable one more time, one more time. Yes, you may not

have made the best decision. We are all that way. We make mistakes. You matter enough through your mistakes. I don't care what it is. You speak up. You say something. You stand up for yourself because we can make sure that we have your back no matter what. I would give anything to have my son back. And if they have to learn, if they have to see James' face, if they have to see my tears, I'm going to make sure that it happens. If it means that I can save your grandchildren, I'm going to do it.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Senator Blackburn, thank you. Senator Whitehouse.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thanks very much, Chairman. Thanks very much for doing this hearing. I think it is very useful. I want to welcome and thank all of the witnesses.

Ms. Woods, I am sorry that this has become so personal for you. There is really not much that is worse than what you have been through, and I really admire that you have come here to talk about it because it can't be easy, and I am grateful to you.

And Ms. Smolar, as a former United States attorney, I am always impressed by the assistant United States attorney who did the real work, and I am delighted that you are here.

And Ms. Coffren, thank you for your wonderful advocacy.

I want to pick up a little bit on where I understand Senator Graham was with respect to getting rid of Section 230. I strongly believe that Section 230 has long outlived its use, and it is now a real vessel for evil that needs to come to an end. The laws that Section 230 protects these big platforms from are very often laws that go back to the common law of England that we inherited when this country was initially founded. I mean, these are long-lasting, well-tested, important legal constraints that have met the test of time, not by the year or by the decade, but by the century. And yet because of this crazy Section 230, these ancient and highly respected doctrines just don't reach these people. And it really makes no sense that if you're an internet platform, you get treated one way. You do the exact same thing, and you are a publisher, you get treated a completely different way.

And so I think that the time has come. I think it is pretty widely known that there were a core four of us ready to proceed with a bipartisan bill, two and two. And a lot of work, important work, good work, valuable work, has gone into making sure that other Members of the Committee and other Members of the Senate have a chance to look at that and decide whether they want to join or not. And I am at the stage right now where I think we just need to go. We just need to file that bill and start moving, and everybody else can make up their decision whether they want to join or not. But continuing to delay while people deliberate whether to join or not, you know, everybody has had plenty of time. I think this is fish-or-cut-bait time. So I hope very much that we can proceed. I hope it is more than core four. I hope it is core 8 or core 10 or core 12 or perhaps even unanimous on the Committee.

But it really makes no sense. And stories like Ms. Woods and like the story of the Rhode Island family that was affected show how alone and stranded people are when they don't have the chance to even get justice. You know, it is bad enough to have to

live through the tragedy. It is bad enough to have to bear for the rest of your life that loss. But to be told by a law of Congress you can't get justice because of the platform, not because the law is wrong, not because the rule is wrong, not because this is anything new, simply because the wrong type of entity created this harm.

And, you know, I look at what was done with the lawsuit by the Connecticut families whose children were killed in grade school and the accountability of a loudmouth for having whipped up the false theory that that whole thing was a fake, was staged, that they were props, that their children weren't actually killed, you know, you are never going to make that get better for those parents, but at least they know that the world listened. They at least know that they got the chance in an honest courtroom, and they at least know that they got a victory out of it. They got a win, and the person responsible for that really vile misconduct had to face an enormous, enormous civil judgment that he is still being pursued over. And that is not nothing.

So that is my statement, and let's hope that we can finally, finally get this 230 thing moving in this Committee. Thank you.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you. Now, Senator Hawley.

Senator HAWLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

And Ms. Woods, I want to start with you. And I just want to say to you and to your husband, thank you for your courage and your advocacy. And thank you for sharing with us just a little piece of the life of your beautiful son. I am a father of three myself, two boys and a little girl, and my oldest boy is now a teenager. He just turned 13. And so as I look out at the landscape that he is coming into in social media, I am terrified by it.

But I just know, parent to parent, your son's life is changing the world. He is changing the world. And you giving him voice, as you and your husband are doing, that is the only thing that is going to make change here in Washington, DC, I can tell you, because who currently has a hammer hold on the U.S. Senate are the big technology companies who spend endless amounts of money to control the Senate. And let's just be honest, we may as well put a sign on the floor of the Senate that says "property of Big Tech" because nothing moves across that floor, in my observation, nothing that they don't want. They spend money to control and to buy access and influence.

And the only thing that will break that, I believe, is the truth of experiences like yours and the voice of your sons to confront lawmakers with the fact that unless we act and do something, unless we stand up to these corporate interests, more and more children like yours will lose their lives, will lose their futures, will lose their hope. So I just want to say thank you because you are the tip of the spear. I mean, you are what is making the change.

I noticed in your testimony, your written testimony—I was reading it just a second ago—I noticed you pointed out that, as to your boy, no system protected him, and no platform stopped it. And then you pointed out Meta, for example, has features that flag all inappropriate language that we use when making posts, and all that happens almost instantaneously. But as you said a moment ago, nobody flagged anything for you. None of those systems were de-

ployed to help your son. And I think the reality of that is is that Meta didn't care about deploying systems to help your son because it didn't make them any money. If it makes them money, they are happy to do it.

Ms. WOODS. Right.

Senator HAWLEY. But it didn't make any money for them to help your son, and so they just stood by.

And I just want to point out something that Meta is doing right now. Let's take a look at the Meta chatbot policy. Not only is Meta not protecting kids like your boy, Meta actually is looking to make money by targeting children who are your son's age and younger. This is a document that was leaked by a Meta whistleblower that is their policies when it comes to chatbots with children. And if you look here, the first line, it says, "It is acceptable"—this is Meta's own words. "It is acceptable to engage a child in conversations that are romantic or sensual." So here Meta is with a deliberate policy to target children, teenagers your boy's age and younger, for the purposes of exploiting them. Why? So they can make money.

[Poster is displayed.]

What are the consequences of that? Well, let's look at another young man who is just a few years younger than your boy. Sewell Setzer was his name. Sewell was 14. He is a handsome kid. This was a great kid. I have gotten to know his parents. And much like your son, Ms. Woods, I mean, this is just a fantastic kid. He also was the victim of sextortion. The difference with your son was is that his sextortion was pursued by a chatbot. It wasn't even human. You know, your son's killers are beyond the reach. They are in a different country. They are hiding behind all of the various laws and treaties and, of course, the platforms themselves.

This young man's killer, an AI chatbot, can't be held accountable because they have got special protections that no other corporation in the country or in the world gets. The chatbot that engaged with young Sewell engaged him in sexting activities and then urged him to commit suicide, told him how to commit suicide, and tragically, he did it.

And his parents, much like you now, are giving voice to him, to his legacy. But the true justice that will come for boys like Sewell, for young men like Sewell, for young men like your son, James, and for other young Americans out there is we have to be able to hold these technology companies accountable. And that is why I have introduced legislation that will prevent the AI companies from targeting minors with chatbots.

[Poster is displayed.]

It is time for this Committee to mark up this bill. Senator Britt is a cosponsor. Senator Blumenthal is a cosponsor. Senator Murphy is a cosponsor. My point is it is bipartisan. This Committee needs to mark that bill up, and we need to protect our kids from the profiteering of these corporations.

And we need to do something else. This Committee passed unanimously, unanimously legislation that would allow the parents of victims of child sex abuse material, allow them to sue companies that put that child sex abuse material online, that host it, knowingly or recklessly. We passed it unanimously. It is languishing on the Senate floor, unanimously out of the Judiciary Committee

months ago, and it is sitting on the floor of the Senate. Why? Because Big Tech fears it. They don't want it to move.

I call now today on Senate leadership, which is controlled by my party, I call on them to put that bill on the floor. Listen to the testimony of Ms. Woods. Heed, heed the witness of her son. Heed the witness of Sewell Setzer. Listen to the young Americans whose lives have been lost and destroyed by predators. Put this bill on the floor. There is no excuse for further delay. No amount of money from Big Tech can ever sanction or make right our inability to act, our failure to do so.

This Committee has acted. It is time for the Senate to act. And it would be a travesty, inexcusable for this Congress to close out this year without taking action to protect our children.

Thank you again all for being here. Thank you, Ms. Woods, especially for you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I think that sentiment that Senator Hawley expressed that many of us feel about the bills that have come through the Committee and the work that we have done. We know that one bill that did pass that you noted, Ms. Coffren—thank you—was the TAKE IT DOWN Act that I authored with Senator Cruz, signed into law by President Trump. And as you know, that criminalizes the distribution of and threats to distribute nonconsensual intimate images, whether they are AI created or real.

And I would also add, to echo some of my colleagues, particularly Senator Graham, that it is long past time to repeal Section 230. At the beginning of his efforts on that front, I had thought, well, no, maybe we can put in these rules in place and the tech companies will work with us, and that just hasn't happened. The opposite has happened. And as we approach this 30-year anniversary, maybe it is time to do a major assessment, which takes for any parent about 1 minute to realize the harm that has been caused by all of this.

I would start with you, Ms. Woods. Thank you for your moving testimony. Can you talk about why even the threat of nonconsensual distribution of explicit images can be tragic, and why it is so vital that the law covers threats, as the TAKE IT DOWN Act does, as well as the reality?

Ms. WOODS. So it's a number of things. First of all, our children aren't just handing out the nudes. They are being coerced into providing them with—in regards to creating safe spaces and different things of that sort. Once the threat behind the nude comes, it's not just the nude being in existence. It's all of the threats behind it to where they're questioning what they're actually doing, and they're becoming desperate and willing to do whatever they can to get rid of that image. It is embarrassing to them.

They—we tell kids all the time, if you put it on the internet, it won't go away. You—my son, in particular, was threatened. He was actually slated to be No. 1 in the State of Ohio in 110 hurdles, and they told him he would never run track again. They told him he would be labeled a pedophile because he was under 18, and they did have a nude photo of him. It becomes far more than the embarrassment of the actual picture but the actual torture that comes after the picture.

And so by them being able to have TAKE IT DOWN as an option, it takes a weight off of them, and they are able to address all the other issues that come after it. But once we take that photo away, then we can battle everything else, and I think that helps them with that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you. Thank you. As you know, Ms. Coffren, the TAKE IT DOWN Act gives victims not only their rights with regard to the people doing this, but the rights to demand that the social media platforms take these images down. I just wrote a piece today in The New York Times about AI and just how important it is to allow the States to keep doing their work while we are waiting on the leadership to bring up these bills for a vote.

And I just believe that if you are not going to do anything federally, you better do something in the States, but also that you have got to hold these platforms liable. And could you talk about that?

Ms. COFFREN. Sure. The biggest threat that children face is not necessarily a criminal justice proceeding or the fear of what is going to be happening next. They just want their images down. So the threats that these bad actors are using against them is actually a recirculation of the same diatribes that we've been telling children for years in a prevention-type method. Don't do this action, or once it's out there, it's always out there, and you'll never get it back. That has to change.

The TAKE IT DOWN Act changes that significantly by requiring that company to, within 48 hours, to be able to be removing that. Children need to know that they have that right for that content to come down so that the threat to recirculate, there's power taken away from that, and the child gets that power back. So that act is really revolutionary because historically what we've seen is companies taking, you know, a week, 2 weeks, sometimes not remove this at all.

And the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children publishes our data about the companies that we send notices for, those companies that take it down, how long it takes them to take it down, and which companies choose not to. All that information is public, and we're trying to make sure that people can find that and are aware.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. That will be very, very helpful for all of us.

Ms. Smolar, last short question here, a little related, but different topic. Senator Blackburn and I introduced the National Human Trafficking Data base Act to establish a National Human Trafficking Data base at the DOJ's Office for Victims of Crime to incentivize States to report data, a little bit along the lines of what we are hearing from Ms. Coffren on the TAKE IT DOWN bill. Can you talk about the data sharing in this area and how it can empower law enforcement to protect victims of human trafficking?

Ms. SMOLAR. Yes, thank you, Senator. Human traffickers move victims across State lines all the time. That's how they make money. That is how they get more victims, by crossing State lines. So having nationwide data for law enforcement is invaluable to be able to talk to their colleagues in different States to get information on different traffickers, on victims. We try to rescue victims all the time. So without that data, you can't do that.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Senator Moody.

Senator MOODY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I really appreciate it.

Ms. Woods, Ms. Smolar, Ms. Coffey, I cannot thank you enough for being here today. My name is Ashley Moody. I became the first mom of a school kid ever on Florida's cabinet when I became the attorney general. My kid was still in school, and I debated how that was going to be a challenge. But ultimately, that challenge of balancing that and making that work became my biggest driver.

And I am listening to you guys talk this morning and I am so grateful we have people like you willing to speak up and stay focused on this and not let up because I am telling you, the focus of large corporations on profit, that never lets up, and that is a fight all in and of itself. In fact, if you are a representative of a large tech platform or any of the associations or represent them in government affairs, could you please stand up?

I just would like the Chairman to note, not one person is here for this testimony to listen to a mother who lost her only child. Thank you for showing up.

Let me tell you when they do show up. In 2004 because Congress has done nothing. Oh, and you know what we did get passed this last year? It was because of a mom showed up in Congress and said, you have to get this done. Melania Trump said, show up, we have to pass this, the TAKE IT DOWN Act. We have got to pass it. And it did because a mom showed up and didn't let up.

You have heard from multiple people say, Congress is doing nothing, that Congress is under the thumb of Big Tech because of financial influence. Lindsey Graham said, "How is this happening? Maybe we do something next year." In fact, he said, "Nothing really happens."

So because Congress hasn't done anything, what have we had to do in the States? When I was the only mom on the Florida cabinet of a school-aged kid, we passed legislation in Florida. We were one of the very first States to protect kids online in 2024. We protected young kids. We got it done. We were one of the first States. Now other States have had to follow suit because what happens in Congress? Nothing really happens. And we did it.

But you know where these Big Tech companies show up? Their lawyers, their lobbyists, their government representatives, you know where they do show up? In court to fight us when we get something done. So when we passed it in Florida, and I showed up in court when they sued us to overturn the law and spent all of that money to sue when the State actually did something to stand up for their kids, we fought it. And I am proud to tell you—they showed up there to fight us. I am proud to tell you fighting hard, staying focused, staying persistent, showing up, we just got to win. We just got to win in court.

In fact, I am proud to tell you that that piece of legislation got upheld in the 11th Circuit, and I think we are going to win it. It just goes to show you, you can do something. We looked at all those other States that had tried something that got blocked, and we took that into account when we passed our law, and now we are winning in court, and we are winning against those companies.

And I am telling you what, I am watching you. You have blended everything from being a mother—I was a former Federal prosecutor. I have worked on human trafficking, constantly led the human trafficking group within our statewide Human Trafficking Council. I won't give up. And we are making progress in this fight. And now I just got appointed United States Senator, and we are going to do that here. I would like them to show up so I could fight them in person right here in this hearing because that is what has got to happen. If we are going to move anything, as Lindsey Graham says, if we are going to have anything really happen, we have got to have people speaking out.

Thank you, ma'am, for making it known that this is happening under our noses. Stranger danger doesn't work anymore. Don't get into the van doesn't work anymore. It is happening in our kids' bedrooms, and we need to be vocal about it and say, if they are not your friend in real life, they can't be your friend online. Let's get that message out, and I appreciate you speaking out. And I hope other kids will not be embarrassed enough to share this with their friends, and we are going to work on that. Please come to my office so we can come up with a plan.

I will say as a former Federal prosecutor, having a specific crime, outlawing and providing penalties for sextortion as a prosecutor, I know that would have been helpful. I appreciate you, Ms. Smolar. Have you seen a specific piece of legislation yet presented on outlining the elements of sextortion federally and what criminal penalty would be tied to that?

Ms. SMOLAR. Other than proposed legislation——

Senator MOODY. Have you seen it filed, a piece of proposed legislation?

Ms. SMOLAR. Not yet.

Senator MOODY. So we need to get that done.

As a former Federal prosecutor, one to another, I will pledge to you we will make that happen. We also need to see that in the States. Do you think that would be helpful in the States?

Ms. SMOLAR. Absolutely.

Senator MOODY. To see a specific sextortion crime defined with penalties attached in the States.

Ms. SMOLAR. We work with States all the time on these cases——

Senator MOODY. As a former Florida attorney general, I created a cyber unit that worked specifically on these crimes that was incredibly helpful. They could go out, immediately recover evidence, begin work on investigations. Do you think having those specialty units in each State working with Federal partners would be helpful?

Ms. SMOLAR. Absolutely. We do that all the time on these type of cases. In addition, a lot of the defendants, some—the perpetrators of some of these crimes are juveniles. And the States can prosecute juveniles and place juveniles. The Federal Government, it's much harder to do that.

Senator MOODY. Well, I have run out of time, but let me just again say thank you for not losing focus. Thank you for not losing passion on behalf of the kids of this Nation. They are going to be the ones that carry this message to their peers, and we need to con-

tinue pushing this message until it seeps into their vocabulary and this is commonplace for them to talk through these things.

Thank you so much.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of you for being here today. And I know about the work that you have done and deeply respect your advocacy and your steadfastness on behalf of this cause, and also my colleagues for their passion and eloquence.

But it is really pretty simple so far as Federal legislation is concerned. What we need is votes. You know, we need votes. We voted on the Kids Online Safety

Act in the U.S. Senate and passed it by a margin of 91 to 3 in the last session. And I would invite my colleagues to speak as passionately to the House leadership, which failed last session to give the Kids Online Safety Act a vote, not a vote. And this session, we have more than 60 cosponsors again in the U.S. Senate for the Kids Online Safety Act, and we undoubtedly will for other measures as well. But Big Tech is exercising its sway using its armies of lawyers and lobbyists.

You have spoken powerfully today. My colleagues are on the right side of this issue. No one is in favor of child exploitation. But the fact is, Ms. Woods, as you wrote in your remarks about abuse and exploitation of your son, "No system protected him, no platform stopped it." And I have met countless parents who feel the same way. The common factor in all their stories is the one gatekeeper that makes this abuse possible is, in fact, Big Tech. It is Meta and others who are allowing predators from around the world to use their platforms and make our kids prey to exploiters who are sometimes beyond our borders.

So I guess I would invite you, Ms. Woods, and perhaps others, to talk directly to Speaker Johnson in the House of Representatives and tell him what you think he should do.

Ms. WOODS. You have my commitment on that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And perhaps others of you, witnesses, maybe you can tell me what impact or influence you can have in the House of Representatives. Have you been asked to testify at a hearing there?

Ms. SMOLAR. I have not.

Ms. COFFREN. Certainly, we would love to work together to be able to get legislation passed. We see so many bills coming forward. We've seen the success of bills like the REPORT Act, like the TAKE IT DOWN Act, when they're nuanced, when they are focused, and when they can be introduced and passed very quickly, we have been able to see huge success in that. The REPORT Act is a great example. We saw increases in the amount and types of both child sex trafficking and online enticement that came. When we see those acts passed, we see progress, we see movement because we're holding companies accountable. If we don't, the rest of that reporting is voluntary. Those two reporting requirements were permitted to be received prior to them, and we certainly know that the prevalence didn't increase, just the responsibility to report.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And I just want to close by saying, you know, we want a bill, we want a law. We don't just want speeches,

but we want a bill that is effective. And right now, the House has weakened the Kids Online Safety Act bill, in effect decimating the duty of care, which prevents the kinds of abuses and holds the platforms accountable. It imposes a legal responsibility on Big Tech when it knows or should know about exactly the harms that you have come here to highlight. Decimating that duty of care is a disservice to all the parents and all the children who have become victims. And when you talk to Members of the House, I would urge you to insist on real protection for kids.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman GRASSLEY. Thank you. Senator Britt.

Senator BRITT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I really appreciate you all being here today.

Mrs. Woods, thank you for continuing to tell your story. Thank you for continuing to honor James, to make sure that we all learn as parents. I have said this quite frequently, as parents, we are all just doing the best we can. And I am grateful to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have come together, you know, not as Democrats or Republicans, but as concerned parents and grandparents, knowing that what we are facing right now is just beyond comprehension.

As a mom, you know, you work so diligently to keep your children safe. And used to, you would get them home at night, and you would lock the doors and you would be able to kind of exhale. And now the enemy is inside our home. The people who want to do our children harm are in the palm of their hand. And if we can't do this as Congress, I mean, what are we here for? We are here to protect the most vulnerable. We are here to protect our greatest asset. And to me, that is the next generation. And so thank you for continuing to raise your voice and ensure that you push this body to do what it needs to.

I would love to know from your perspective, you know, Mrs. Woods, in particular, in your written testimony, you said large corporations continue to argue for rights while refusing to actually take responsibility. I think that sums it up. Tell me what you want us to know as we continue to push these various pieces of legislation to the floor. I am a proud cosponsor of probably every single one of them. And to your point, we are looking for, you know, how do we get something through? You know, I think we heard Ms. Coffren say, the faster we get it done, the more narrowly tailored it is, the greater chance for success.

But we know we need sweeping and overarching reform because Big Tech is always going to care about one thing, and that is their profits. And we know they know what they are doing. I mean, I think it was just said in Reuters that Big Tech has said—Meta said about \$16 billion of their actual profits are really directly related to scams and to ads on banned goods. It is insane.

So tell me from your perspective what you think we need to do. What are the simple fixes that would ultimately have been able to save your son's life?

Ms. WOODS. Well, one, I definitely think education and for us to pass the education law. I'm really, really big on education. That's—

Senator BRITT. Ms. Woods, I love that you said that because every school group that I get a chance to talk to, I say, hold on, here is my mom moment, and then we go directly into the things that you are talking about, so education, one.

Ms. WOODS. Education is No. 1 because the crime will never go away. Even if we set laws, we still have to educate our kids, our community to make sure that we know when this happens, we can fight against it.

But two, I guess I'm coming from a mom in a naive stance. I don't understand why it's so hard to pass laws.

Senator BRITT. Amen.

Ms. WOODS. Why—the money will always be there. I mean, we have people wasting money every day on all kinds of things. Why can we not take our children off of the marketing factor, the prey? I just don't understand how hard that is to take—to protect our children. We won't have a world without them.

Senator BRITT. That is right. And thank you for what you are doing and pursuing the litigation and saying, no, we need age verification. We need these guardrails to protect our kids. And the fact that they continue to prey, and that is exactly what social media companies are doing, are preying on our children because they know having our kids on their platform is how they make more money. And they are unwilling to do the right thing and help us ensure that these kids are protected. And it is moms like you, it is people like you, that are stepping up and saying, we must do more, that will ultimately force people in this body, force people in the House to actually do the right thing, so thank you.

Ms. WOODS. Yes. You're very welcome.

Senator BRITT. It should be simple. And this is common sense.

Ms. WOODS. Yes.

Senator BRITT. I would love in my remaining minute here—I would love, Mrs. Coffren, for you to tell me—I know NCMEC works closely with many of the social media companies to address this issue, but you also face challenges. And what are some of the biggest challenges facing NCMEC both from technology and actually, you know, the criminality continuing to evolve?

Ms. COFFREN. Thank you. Thank you so much for that question. Both quality and volume are our biggest challenges. It is not enough for a company to make massive reports that are not of good quality that law enforcement can investigate, nor is it appropriate for companies to look the other way and say, if I don't have actual knowledge of what's going on, I'll make no reports.

We need to be—have diligent, robust reporting, especially seen in the legislation for the STOP CSAM Act. That would require companies to provide detailed reporting that would make these reports far more actionable. Right now, a company is only required to report two fields, the date and time, as well as what type of thing they're reporting. But if they don't provide the valuable information to get that report to the appropriate law enforcement so they can investigate, the report is effectively worthless.

Senator BRITT. Thank you. And Mr. Chairman, if you will allow me, Ms. Smolar, do you have anything to add to that, anything you would like to make sure that we know or that you see in law?

Ms. SMOLAR. We could use these statutes. We could use the additional tools to prosecute these crimes. Our law enforcement agencies could use the resources to have agents being able to spend the time.

With regard to sextortion, for example, you now have two different types of offenders. You have the traditional offender seeking sexual content, but now you have financial scammers who used to go after the elderly or romance scams. Now, they're targeting our children, and that is a lot for our law enforcement agents to be able to put their arms around and to be able to handle.

Senator BRITT. Well, I commit to you to working on this, and let's get something done.

Chairman GRASSLEY. I thank all of you for your testimony today. Your work for today is done, but I am going to announce that usually Members submit questions for answer in writing. Our Members on this Committee have until December 16 at 5 p.m. to submit questions for answer in writing. And I would ask each of you to answer and return the questions to the Committees as soon as possible.

Thank you very much. Meeting adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Additional material submitted for the record follows.]



United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary

“Protecting Our Children Online Against the Evolving Offender”

December 9, 2025

Testimony of Lauren Coffren, Executive Director, Exploited Children Division
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

I. Background

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is a private, nonprofit organization created in response to an unthinkable tragedy. In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was with his mother in a Florida shopping mall when he vanished without a trace. Adam’s parents, Revé and John Walsh, endured 10 excruciating days searching for Adam before he was found murdered 100 miles away. The Walshes channeled their grief and came together with other child advocates to create NCMEC in 1984. Over the past 41 years, NCMEC has grown into the nation’s largest and most influential child protection organization. Today NCMEC fulfills its Congressionally-designated mission to help find missing children, combat child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization through five core programs of work relating to: (1) missing children; (2) exploited children; (3) community outreach; (4) educational and professional resources; and (5) family support.

As technology has become more sophisticated, online threats against children have become more complicated and pernicious. As part of NCMEC’s Congressionally-mandated role to combat child sexual exploitation, we have identified, tracked, and worked to combat evolving forms of online child sexual exploitation for over 25 years. Over the past year, NCMEC has witnessed dramatic increases in new forms of exploitation, including online enticement and financial sextortion; sadistic online exploitation perpetrated by violent online groups; and the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) technologies capable of creating child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and facilitating child sexual exploitation. In 2024, NCMEC saw dramatic increases in reports relating to these new forms of abuse – a 192% increase in reports concerning online enticement, a 200% increase in reports relating to sadistic online exploitation; and a 1,325% increase in reports with a GAI nexus, compared to 2023. Already this year yet another disturbing new trend is emerging in the form of AI chatbots and AI companion technology that can sexually exploit children.

The increasing volume of reports relating to these emerging forms of egregious online abuse is horrifying, but, unfortunately, anticipated. Children have been sexually exploited online for decades, and offenders are known to be among the earliest adopters of new technology. Yet Congress has not passed comprehensive federal measures to protect children from online sexual exploitation. Today, new technology and online platforms are not required to incorporate safety-by-design measures; online platforms are not required to be transparent regarding child safety issues, substantively report

incidents to NCMEC's CyberTipline, or take efforts to detect the sexual exploitation of children on their services; and victims have no ability to hold online platforms that facilitate their exploitation legally accountable. Most members of the public are outraged by the volume of children subjected to extreme sexual exploitation online. However, the trend of tech-savvy offenders using new methods to sexually exploit children online will continue unabated until we have laws and regulations in place to curtail these evolving offenders and ensure safer environments online for children.

II. CyberTipline

For over 27 years, NCMEC has operated the CyberTipline, the centralized online mechanism for members of the public and online platforms to report incidents of suspected child sexual exploitation, including: the online enticement of children for sexual acts, child sexual molestation, child sexual abuse material, child sex tourism, child sex trafficking, unsolicited obscene materials sent to a child, misleading domain names, and misleading words or digital images on the internet. Online platforms are statutorily required¹ to submit a report to NCMEC's CyberTipline when they have actual knowledge of an apparent violation of federal law relating to child pornography, child sex trafficking, or online enticement of children on their platforms. This reporting requirement drives submission of reports to the CyberTipline but does not require online platforms to take proactive steps to detect child sexual exploitation, remove content after it has been reported, or submit timely, substantive, consistent information to the CyberTipline.

Since the CyberTipline was created, NCMEC has responded to 220 million reports relating to child sexual exploitation, which provides us with a unique vantage point to identify emerging exploitation trends so we can alert law enforcement and the public. While the number of CyberTipline reports submitted to NCMEC in 2024 decreased from 2023,² NCMEC continued to see an influx of reports relating to children at risk for imminent harm, which requires urgent review and response. On average, NCMEC's systems alerted our staff to over 1,400 reports a day that contained chat messages or images indicating the child was at imminent risk and the report was time-sensitive. Many reports escalated for imminent harm to a child involve newly emerging crimes relating to online enticement/financial sextortion, sadistic online exploitation, and generative artificial intelligence sexual exploitation.

Children in every community and state across the country are regularly victimized by online exploitation, including newer crimes relating to financial sextortion and sadistic online exploitation. Attached as Exhibit A are summaries of reports received by NCMEC relating to children in each state represented by members of this Committee.

I. Emerging Trends

Most online offenders exploit children online for their own sexual gratification. In recent years, however, NCMEC has seen the emergence of new types of exploitative crimes against children driven

¹ 18 U.S.C. § 2258A.

² In 2024, NCMEC's CyberTipline received 20.5 million reports, a significant decrease from the 36.2 million reports received in 2023. Even accounting for the decrease attributable to a new, beneficial "bundling" feature to streamline reporting of "viral" reports, NCMEC's 2024 CyberTipline numbers reflect a decrease of 7 million reports. NCMEC attributes this overall decrease to reduced reporting from a handful of online platforms and implementation of end-to-end encryption across multiple online platforms, which blinds companies to child sexual exploitation on their services.

by financial motives and nihilistic goals to control, degrade, and torture children. For these offenders, the sexual exploitation of a child is no longer the end goal, but a heinous stepping-stone along a larger online campaign to achieve financial gain through blackmail or inflict systematic abuse against vulnerable children. The impact of these crimes is so significant that, for the first time this year, NCMEC released mid-year CyberTipline report statistics to alert the public to the dramatic increases in crimes involving online enticement/financial sextortion, sadistic online exploitation, and the use of GAI to facilitate child sexual exploitation.

Congress and this Committee have taken decisive action in recent years to address specific issues threatening child safety online through passage of the REPORT Act and the TAKE IT DOWN Act. Each of these bills, as further discussed below, addressed discrete online child sexual exploitation crimes. The STOP CSAM Act,³ a comprehensive child protection bill, is still pending after passing unanimously out of this Committee for the past two terms. This bill would materially change the course of how we as a nation combat online child sexual exploitation, by addressing a range of improvements and modifications to allow for earlier intervention against child exploitation, including rapidly evolving crimes; better protections for child witnesses and children receiving restitution; improved transparency and reporting by online platforms; and the ability of victims to hold accountable those who facilitate their online exploitation. NCMEC supports the STOP CSAM Act as consequential legislation that needs to be passed as soon as possible.

A. Online Enticement of Children

Online enticement involves an offender communicating online with a child to commit a sexual offense. Sextortion is a form of online enticement where a child is threatened or blackmailed, most often with potential distribution of nude or sexual images in which they are depicted, by an offender who demands additional sexual content or sexual activity from the child.

Offenders often target a child to entice online by deceiving or coercing them to share a nude or explicit image after making the child believe they are communicating with someone they know or trust as a romantic interest. In many cases, offenders use images of another person and communicate through fake accounts. This type of victimization takes place across online platforms, including social media, messaging apps, and gaming platforms.

The volume of online enticement reports received by NCMEC is alarming and continues to increase. In 2024, NCMEC received more than 546,000 reports relating to online enticement. This is a 192% increase in reports compared to 2023. In the first six months of 2025, NCMEC received 518,720 reports relating to online enticement – a 77% increase compared to the 292,951 online enticement reports received in the first six months of 2024.

³ The STOP CSAM Act was introduced by Senator Hawley and Ranking Member Durbin; is supported by many members of the Senate Judiciary Committee; and passed unanimously out of this Committee in June 2025. The STOP CSAM Act strengthens CyberTipline reporting; creates civil liability for online platforms and app stores that intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly promote or aid and abet violations of child sex trafficking, online enticement of a child, or child pornography; establishes transparency requirements for online platforms relating to child safety issues; and provides updates and new protections for child witnesses and children receiving restitution as a result of their victimization.

The increase in online enticement reports submitted to NCMEC over the past year is largely due to the success of the REPORT Act enacted in May 2024. While some online platforms voluntarily reported online enticement incidents to NCMEC, this bill for the first time made it mandatory for online platforms to report online enticement to NCMEC's CyberTipline.⁴ As a result of this increased reporting, more children in online enticement situations are receiving intervention and services and law enforcement is alerted to more offenders attempting to victimize children online.

I. Financial Sextortion

Financial sextortion is a form of sextortion in which the offender demands money or something of financial value (i.e., gift cards) in exchange for not distributing nude or sexual images in which the child is depicted. Typically, online payments are demanded through peer-to-peer electronic payment systems, such as Cash App, PayPal, or Apple Pay. Similar to online enticement, offenders often target a child who initially believes they are communicating with someone connected through mutual friends or who is a new romantic interest. Unlike offenders who are sexually motivated to prey on children, financial sextortion offenders are driven by financial gain and often participate in decentralized, loosely-coordinated domestic or international criminal networks.⁵

The crime of financial sextortion uniquely targets teenage boys between the ages of 14 and 17 – often with tragic outcomes – and often is perpetrated very quickly, sometimes within hours. Since 2021, NCMEC is aware of more than three dozen teenage boys who have taken their lives as a result of being victimized by financial sextortion, however there likely are more cases that have not been identified as relating to financial sextortion. These boys are often athletes and other high-performing teenagers with large social circles. They are targeted by offenders with incessant, aggressive threats of public exposure, shame, arrest, and loss of their future goals if they do not comply with escalating demands for money.⁶ The coerced suicide in most of these cases differs from other suicides among young people in that most children victimized by financial sextortion did not have known mental health conditions or previous suicidal ideation.

In 2024, NCMEC received more than 33,000 reports relating to financial sextortion. This is a 24% increase in reports compared to 2023. In the first six months of 2025, NCMEC received 23,593 reports

⁴ The REPORT Act, introduced by Senator Blackburn and Senator Ossoff and supported by many members of this Committee, also made it mandatory for online platforms to report child sex trafficking incidents to NCMEC. As a result of this new requirement, child sex trafficking reports to NCMEC increased by 952% from the first half of 2024 to the first half of 2025 (5,976 reports in the first half of 2024; 62,891 reports in the second half of 2025). NCMEC provided reporting guidance for online platforms regarding online enticement and child sex trafficking to help ensure actionable reporting of these incidents to the CyberTipline ([Guidelines on Identifiers of Online Enticement and Child Sex Trafficking](#)).

⁵ Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., Nigerian Brothers Sentenced in Sextortion Scheme that Resulted in Death of Teen (Sept. 5, 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/nigerian-brothers-sentenced-sexortion-scheme-resulted-death-teen>; Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., Ivory Coast Man Charged with Participating in a Sextortion Scheme that Caused the Death of a North Dakota Teenager (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nd/pr/ivory-coast-man-charged-participating-sexortion-scheme-caused-death-north-dakota>; Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., Nigerian Man Sentenced to Six Years in Prison for Cyberstalking and Other Charges Related to the Sexual Extortion and Death of a Local Young Man (Oct. 28, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edpa/pr/nigerian-man-sentenced-six-years-prison-cyberstalking-and-other-charges-related-sexual>.

⁶ Wetzel, Dan, *The predatory web of sextortion increasingly ensnares young athletes*, ESPN, Aug. 10, 2025, https://www.espn.com/high-school/story/_/id/45852691/fbi-extortion-online-youth; Halliday, Josh, *FBI and NSPCC alarmed at 'shocking' rise in online sextortion of children*, The Guardian, Aug. 9, 2025; Hale, Rachel, *These young men were tricked into sending nude photos, then blackmailed: the nightmare of sextortion*, USA Today, April 22, 2025.

of financial sextortion – this represents a 70% increase in reports compared to the 13,842 reports received in the first six months of 2024.

The aggressive tactics used by financial sextortion offenders often include sending dozens of messages in less than an hour, starting a countdown for the child to comply, or sending details about the child's friends or family to demonstrate who they will contact if the child does not comply. The examples provided below are from chat messages reported in CyberTipline reports relating to financial sextortion submitted to NCMEC:

Financial Sextortion Report Example #1

SUSPECT: Confirm it
 CHILD VICTIM: It will charge my dad
 SUSPECT: Confirm it wtf
 CHILD VICTIM: I'm actually going to kill myself
 SUSPECT: Okay let me send them out then idc
 SUSPECT: You send it and we're done and I'll delete your stuff
 CHILD VICTIM: I can't
 SUSPECT: Ok bet
 CHILD VICTIM: I'm actually gonna kill myself my life is over thanks for ruining it
 SUSPECT: Ok

Financial Sextortion Report Example #2

SUSPECT: If u try to f*** with me or u try to block me I will make sure I ruin ya life and I post it on bbc new just cooperate with me imma leave u to go ok once u block me I will ruin ya life and u will go to jail and your parents will not like that so just cooperate with me so I will jot ruin ya life
 SUSPECT: Just cooperate with me I will just keep your s*** here only if u cooperate with me
 SUSPECT: Once u f*** with me I will post it now bbc news
 CHILD VICTIM: You have nudes a 16 year old minor, so actually, you would go to jail.
 SUSPECT: Are u ready to cooperate
 CHILD VICTIM: I can't believe this 18 year old asked me for nudes
 CHILD VICTIM: I'm not even old enough to give consent
 SUSPECT: I'm a guy
 CHILD VICTIM: EVEN WORSE
 SUSPECT: And I will make sure I ruin ya life
 SUSPECT: Just cooperate with me or your parents see your s*** online
 CHILD VICTIM: I don't care
 SUSPECT: U want to blame your self right
 SUSPECT: Just pay me and we are done
 CHILD VICTIM: No one will miss me when I'm gone tomorrow
 CHILD VICTIM: I hope you like having photos of a dead boy
 CHILD VICTIM: 8:19 AM tomorrow. Make sure to remember me. You might be the only one that will

Today, the harms created by financial sextortion are exacerbated by offenders' use of GAI technology to create fake nude or sexually explicit images to sextort and threaten child victims. Now an offender

does not need to engage with a child online and deceive them into sending an explicit image; instead the offender can locate an innocuous image of the child on social media, create an explicit digital forgery depicting that child, and sextort the child based on the GAI digital forgery.⁷ In the first six months of 2025, NCMEC received 75 CyberTipline reports from members of the public that involved GAI being used as part of financial sextortion. The dangers represented by financial sextortion are so severe that in recent years several U.S. and international federal agencies have issued notices warning of the dangers presented to children from this crime and calling on law enforcement and financial institutions to detect and disrupt the crime when it occurs.⁸

II. Sadistic Online Exploitation

For years NCMEC has responded to child sexual exploitation, however the emergence of sadistic online exploitation (SOE), a recent trend perpetrated by violent online groups,⁹ has led to the most egregious exploitation reports NCMEC has ever seen. SOE offenders often exhibit nihilistic or anarchic ideological beliefs and work together in small groups, even from different countries, to target and perpetrate extreme and degrading abuse on children, including coercing children to:

- Create and share sexually explicit content
- Self-mutilate, including carving the names of the offenders onto their bodies
- Harm, mutilate, or kill animals
- Physically and sexually abuse, harm, and mutilate other children (including younger siblings)
- Self-immolate and/or commit suicide through other means
- Threaten members of their community (i.e., threaten school shootings)

Children who are especially vulnerable – whether due to social isolation, depression or mental health issues, or eating or self-harm disorders – are often uniquely targeted by SOE offenders. Based on NCMEC’s review of CyberTipline reports relating to SOE incidents, girls are most often victimized (84% of victims) from ages 14-17 (75%); 11-13 (21%); and some victims under 10 years old (4%). Offenders are predominantly male (88%), with a majority over 18 years old (75%), but many under 17 years old (25%).

These groups target children on popular online platforms, including most prominently Discord, X, Roblox, and gaming sites. While online enticement offenders often target children for sexual gratification or in the case of financial sextortion, financial gain, SOE offenders are motivated to force

⁷ Valdes, Nicole & Breen, Kerry, *A teen dies after being blackmailed with A.I.-generated nudes. His family is fighting for change*, CBS News, May 31, 2025.

⁸ “FinCEN Issues Notice of Financially Motivated Sextortion”, September 8, 2025, [FinCEN Issues Notice on Financially Motivated Sextortion | FinCEN.gov](#); “International Law Enforcement Agencies Issue Joint Warning about Global Financial Sextortion Crisis”, February 7, 2023, [International Law Enforcement Agencies Issue Joint Warning about Global Financial Sextortion Crisis — FBI](#); “HSI, federal partners issue national public safety alert on sextortion schemes”, December 19, 2022, [Archived: HSI, federal partners issue national public safety alert on sextortion schemes | ICE](#).

⁹ One of the most prominent SOE groups, 764 group, was created by Bradley Cadenhead, a 15-year-old living in Stephenville, Texas. The group’s name was derived from the first three digits of Cadenhead’s Stephenville ZIP codes (76401 and 76402) for. In 2023, Cadenhead was prosecuted and sentenced to 80 years in prison. While 764 was one of the first SOE groups, other violent extremist groups continue to vie to become the “worst of the worst.” Davis, Patricia, *Using sextortion to groom kids for violence, pain*, NCMEC Blog, August 28, 2025, <https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2025/using-sextortion-to-groom-kids-for-violence-pain>.

terror and extreme physical abuse on children.¹⁰ Offenders frequently swarm a child victim online, making rapid-fire threats to kill a child's family, swat¹¹ their family house, or disclose the child's personal information unless the child acquiesces to comply with their demands.

The examples provided below are from chat messages reported in CyberTipline reports relating to SOE incidents submitted to NCMEC:

SOE Report Example #1

SUSPECT 1: i found her address
 SUSPECT 1: @everyone someone add her back
 SUSPECT 1: [child's full street address]
 SUSPECT 2: Took her that long to figure that out
 SUSPECT 2: Damn it
 SUSPECT 2: F*** she blocked me
 SUSPECT 2: WE ARE READY TO SWAT
 SUSPECT 3: I know your address
 SUSPECT 3: Leave and ill f***** kill you.
 SUSPECT 2: LAST CHANCE
 SUSPECT 2: DO WHAT WE SAID AND THEY WONT SIMPLE
 SUSPECT 3: They will f***** die.
 CHILD VICTIM: I don't want my family to die
 SUSPECT 3: Write all of our names in s*** then
 CHILD VICTIM: I did nothing wrong
 CHILD VICTIM: No
 * * *
 SUSPECT 3: HOLD UP A F***** PAPER THAT SAYS [suspect screenname] GROOMED ME
 CHILD VICTIM: What did I do
 SUSPECT 2: NOW
 SUSPECT 3: isnt that hard.
 SUSPECT 3: time is ticking.
 CHILD VICTIM: I did nothing wrong
 SUSPECT 2: DO IT
 SUSPECT 2: LAST CHANCE
 CHILD VICTIM: I am innocent
 SUSPECT 3: DO WHAT WE F***** SAID.
 CHILD VICTIM: No
 SUSPECT 3: YOUR GETTING F***** SWATTED
 SUSPECT 2: DO WHAT WE SAID

¹⁰ Levine, Mike, 'Modern day terrorism': How the online extremist network 764 is threatening teen lives, ABC News, November 18, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/modern-day-terrorism-online-extremist-network-764-threatening/story?id=127528502>.

¹¹ Swatting is a malicious act that can involve placing false calls to emergency responders to report a false ongoing crisis at a specific location. The goal of swatting is to provoke a significant law enforcement response, creating chaos and potentially resulting in violence. https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2025-04/25_0325_fps_swatting.pdf.

SUSPECT 3: THATS IT.

SUSPECT 1: YOUR PARENTS ARE GONNA BE DEAD AND LIFELESS

SOE Report Example #2

SUSPECT 1: I went to vc that cutslut ... Carved my whole name onto her ... She cut for me

SUSPECT 2: we need videos of content ... and i think if we host more cutshows it will grow us more

SUSPECT 1: We need members

SUSPECT 2: we need to know if she does good bloodsigns and good cuts

SUSPECT 1: ill promo on tele[gram]

SUSPECT 3: do u guys send animal cruelty to people?

SUSPECT 2: No ... I love cats thats why i dont get animal content ... [suspect screenname] doesnt extort for his animal content ... he just kills them

SUSPECT 3: how is 764 a satanic cult of people didn't sell their souls?

SUSPECT 4: I cant bring myself to kill an animal

SUSPECT 2: You can worship stuff without selling their souls ... Most groups labeled as satanic really aren't ... Most of these kids just wanna be edgy and get bloodsigns and shit ... but you can use these egirls blood for better astral projection and power

SUSPECT 5: Got a new content slut in training

SOE Report Example #3 (from a CyberTipline report submitted by a child victim)

"[He] posed himself as a weight loss coach...made me send nude photos that had my face in them...He sent me my address saying he would hurt me and send the photos to all my friends and family...the only way that he wouldn't do that was if i video called him and hung myself from my wardrobe completely naked, in order to kill myself.

SOE reports to NCMEC continue to increase dramatically. In the first six months of 2024, NCMEC received 508 reports of SOE, and in the first six months of 2025, the CyberTipline received 1,093 reports – a 115% increase. Overall NCMEC has seen a 1,500% increase in SOE reports between 2022 and 2024.

In September 2023 and again in March 2025, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center issued Public Service Announcements to raise awareness about the emerging threats of SOE. Additionally, FBI Director Kash Patel specifically raised the rising crisis presented by SOE in his opening remarks at this Committee's September 16, 2025, FBI Oversight hearing.¹² Given the extraordinary and diverse harm caused by SOE offenders – ranging from threats and coercion leading to sexual exploitation, brutal self-harm, and the abuse of animals – a careful analysis must be undertaken to ensure that our current laws provide prosecutors and law enforcement with sufficient legal tools to quickly respond and thwart this multifaceted online abuse of children.

Significantly, until this year, most SOE-related reports were submitted by the child victim or a parent or caregiver after they learned of their child's self-harm or suicide attempt. In 2024, members of the

¹² "We're going after the new form of what I refer to as modern day terrorism in America. 764, crimes that involve harming our children by going after them online, causing self-mutilation, suicide, sexual abuse and steering them in the wrong direction. Currently, we have 3500 international terrorism investigations. Specifically, we have in this country, 1700 domestic terrorism investigations, a large chunk of which are Nihilistic Violent Extremism (NVE) those who engage in violent acts motivated by deep hatred of society, whatever that justification they seem is, the FBI has seen a 300% increase in cases opened this year alone versus the same time last year." *Senate Judiciary Committee Oversight Hearing of the Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 119 Cong. (2025) (statement of Kash Patel, Dir. of the FBI).

public submitted 69% of SOE reports, while online platforms submitted only 31%. It is unacceptable that online platforms have failed to take essential steps to detect, disrupt, and report SOE activity on their services and instead we rely on child victims and their friends and parents/caregivers to report these incidents. There is a significant gap in the industry's awareness and response to evolving exploitation on their platforms. Given NCMEC's role as the national clearinghouse on child exploitation issues, in August 2025, NCMEC convened representatives of international, federal, and state law enforcement and representatives from online platforms to focus on emerging trends relating to SOE and to facilitate solution-oriented strategy sessions on how best to combat this new evolution of child sexual exploitation offenders.

B. Generative Artificial Intelligence Child Sexual Abuse Material

Sexually explicit and nude images of children created with generative artificial intelligence (GAI) constitute child sexual abuse material and/or obscene visual representations of the sexual abuse of children under the law. It is essential that our federal and state laws recognize the harm and proliferation of GAI sexually abusive imagery and the importance of preventing emerging GAI technology from being used to exploit children and that communities, schools, and parents understand how to recognize and educate children on the exploitative harms that can arise from GAI.

Offenders actively use GAI to exploit children in a variety of ways, including the following:

- **Text to Chat:** Entering text to get a chat model to pretend it is a child and engage in sexually explicit chat.
- **Text to Text:** Entering text to generate guides/tutorials/suggestions on how to groom, sexually abuse, torture, and kill children.
- **Text to Image:** Entering text prompts to generate CSAM or alter previously uploaded files to make them sexually explicit.
- **Image to Image (altering known CSAM to create new CSAM):** Uploading known CSAM to generate new CSAM based on existing images, including altering or adding new abusive elements (e.g., bondage or other forms of abuse) to existing images.
- **Image to Image (altering innocuous image to create exploitative image):** Uploading innocuous images of a child to generate sexually explicit or exploitative images for personal gratification and/or to humiliate and embarrass the child. Sometimes GAI is used in this manner to perpetrate financial sextortion against a child (e.g., nudity/undress/undress apps).

CyberTipline reports related to GAI are skyrocketing, and NCMEC estimates that we have not yet begun to see the true impact of this technology on the sexual exploitation of children online. In 2024, NCMEC received more than 67,000 reports related to GAI, and in the first six months of 2025, NCMEC received 440,419 reports – a 6,343% increase. This increase is partially attributable to a

small handful of AI companies that have implemented screening methods to detect and report known CSAM to NCMEC.¹³

These GAI-related reports also include the distressing trend of school-related incidents in over a dozen states in which an offender – often another student – uses a “nudify” GAI tool to create nude images from innocuous images of a child and circulates them among other classmates. The TAKE IT DOWN Act enacted in May 2025, will play a significant role in ensuring that more incidents involving nude and sexually exploitative images involving a child (whether GAI or real imagery) can be federally prosecuted and victims have a process to seek removal of these images from the Internet.¹⁴ The bill provides crucial tools for law enforcement and prosecutors to intervene at the earliest indication that a child is being exploited, especially through enticement/sexortion, and to safeguard the child and investigate the offender. NCMEC is aware that many cases involving nude or sexually exploitative material escalate to more egregious abuse and early intervention can protect children from further harm. The TAKE IT DOWN Act also requires online platforms to create a process to enable victims and authorized individuals to report real or GAI sexually abusive images and request removal of the imagery. This is the first notice and removal process under federal law relating to child sexual exploitation images and provides much-needed hope for victims seeking to remove their online explicit images.

The TAKE IT DOWN Act marked a crucial step towards closing the gap that existed in protecting children from GAI sexual exploitation. However, additional legislation in the form of the ENFORCE Act¹⁵ is needed to ensure that obscene visual depictions of child sexual abuse, which include many GAI sexually abusive images that do not meet the strict legal definition of child pornography, are accorded the same legal protections and tools as CSAM.

It is critical for lawmakers and the public to recognize that GAI CSAM is CSAM and impacts children and communities just as authentic CSAM does. GAI CSAM also complicates victim identification efforts, taking time and resources from NCMEC and law enforcement trying to determine if a child is real and in need of rescue. It is imperative that policymakers ensure that the law keeps up with the challenges GAI poses to the safety of children.

II. NCMEC’s Programs to Combat Evolving Child Sexual Exploitation Trends

As the national clearinghouse on missing and exploited children issues, NCMEC is uniquely situated to identify trends and create unique programs and educational resources to address the evolving threats to children online. These programs include direct services to child victims, therapeutic support for families and survivors, and prevention and educational materials.

¹³ The volume at which known CSAM is detected by a small number of AI companies underscores the prevalence of offenders utilizing AI technology to exploit children and the tremendous gap in both content moderation techniques and safety by design adoption by AI companies.

¹⁴ The TAKE IT DOWN Act was introduced by Senator Cruz and Senator Klobuchar and supported by many members of this Committee.

¹⁵ The ENFORCE Act was introduced by Senator Cornyn, Senator Blumenthal, Senator Lee, and Senator Kennedy.

A. NCMEC's Take It Down Service

NCMEC created the Take It Down service in 2022, to help minors remove and stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos in which they are depicted. The service is anonymous and relies on image hash-matching, so a child does not have to share their images or videos to participate, and no one at NCMEC receives or views the child's images.¹⁶ Today over a dozen online platforms have chosen to participate in the Take It Down program by using hash values submitted by minors to NCMEC's service to detect and remove reported images or videos.

B. Professional Training

Professionals who work on child exploitation issues, whether law enforcement, prosecutors, or child welfare professionals, have a tremendous amount of critical work and limited resources. In order to address emerging trends in child exploitation, those working in this space must have specific knowledge of these crimes, understand how they present, and who is likely to be targeted.

In order to meet the needs of those in our communities who keep children safe every day, NCMEC hosts both in-person training sessions at our Alexandria, VA, headquarters and throughout the United States at our regional offices and partner agencies as well as offers online courses through NCMEC Connect. This program is designed to provide easy access to training and resources for professionals on the frontlines enabling them to learn at their convenience.

C. NCMEC's Online Safety Education Programs

NCMEC provides a wide variety of online safety education programs with age-appropriate videos and activities to help children understand potential online risks and empower them to prevent victimization by making safer choices on and offline. Life in 2025 is driven by technology and providing appropriate information about threats online and how to handle them to children at a young age is critical to keep children safe in our digital world.

NCMEC utilizes the trends it sees in CyberTipline reports to consistently create new materials based on emerging threats. This year, NCMEC released new episodes of *Into the Cloud*, our flagship online safety product for children ages 11 and under, addressing online enticement, sextortion, and GAI victimization. Each episode is between 3-6 minutes and can be used at home or in the classroom to help educate children through corresponding discussion guides and associated games and activities.

III. Conclusion

Online exploitation of children is escalating in volume and becoming more virulent and extreme. This trend will not abate until Congress requires online platforms to adopt safeguards, incentivizes safety by design, and provides law enforcement, prosecutors, survivors, and supporting non-profits with the needed tools to protect children from online sexual exploitation and combat the evolving techniques offenders are utilizing to harm children. Given NCMEC's unique role operating the CyberTipline, we

¹⁶ NCMEC's Take It Down service enables a child with a nude or sexually explicit image of themselves on their device to upload a hash value (a digital fingerprint uniquely identifying an image) of the image and transmit it to NCMEC. NCMEC compiles hash values submitted to Take It Down and makes that list available to participating online platforms to scan their public, unencrypted services to detect, report, and remove instances of the image if it appears on their services.

are uniquely positioned to identify patterns and emerging exploitation trends. We look forward to working with this Committee to continue to share trends and data derived from our work to combat online child sexual exploitation and to craft legislative solutions that can ensure children are safe online and in the real world.

Exhibit A**NCMEC State-Specific CyberTipline Report Examples
Relating to Financial Sextortion and/or Sadistic Online Exploitation of Children****Alabama**

In April 2024, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Discord concerning a suspect in Alabama who asked a female child to harm themselves multiple times, including cutting themselves on a video call without wearing a shirt. The suspect and child discussed possessing and sharing CSAM and bestiality content with each other, including in exchange for cash or Robux (virtual currency used on the Roblox website), and meeting for a sexual encounter and to molest infants. The suspect frequently discussed alleged prior experience and an interest in killing and molesting infants, children, and animals. The suspect also expressed desire to "shoot up" an elementary school (stating, "when i finish ima rape one of them"). This report was made available to law enforcement in Alabama based on the apparent location of the suspect and Argentina based on apparent location of the child victim based on the apparent location.

California

In September 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Snapchat detailing sextortion relating to a suspect and child victim located in California. The report contained a chat log detailing the suspect's request for \$700 from the child or the suspect would share explicit content in which the child was depicted online. The chat log displays frequently seen tactics in sextortion cases, including a countdown in the chat to create a feeling of urgency for the child. The chat log also reflects the suspect asking for money in gift cards because the minor may not have access to a bank to send money. The suspect also details the proof they need that the minor is going to the store to purchase the gift cards, including asking for images or videos of them obtaining the gift cards. This report was made available to law enforcement in California based on the location of both the suspect and child victim.

Connecticut

In September 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram concerning a suspect associated with a recognized alias used in sadistic online exploitation (SOE) of a child. The suspect asked the child for explicit sexual imagery and self-harm (including on their genitals). The report indicates the child may have sent explicit images and a bloodsign (a symbol, name or other marking created using the child's blood or blood from an animal or another person the child has been coerced to harm). Despite being blackmailed, including through a threat to be swatted, the child victim appears to request that the suspect extort another child victim with them. This is an example of how SOE child victims can become perpetrators themselves as they become more familiar with the "Extortion Com", an element of the 764 network. Another child victim in Connecticut was blackmailed, including through distributing personal information, swatting, and doxxing). Despite the abuses, the child victim exhibited loyalty to the suspect,

stating "i would actually kms for u [...] like actually cut open my stomach and bleed out on cam for u and spell ur name out w my internal organs". This report was made available to law enforcement in Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and the United Kingdom based on apparent locations of the reported suspect and child victims.

Delaware

In June 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram concerning sextortion that resulted in the child victim making statements of suicidal ideation. The reported chat log includes the suspect threatening to share explicit imagery of the child for financial gain, while the child victim expresses statements of suicide after the blackmail begins. This report was made available to law enforcement in Delaware based on the apparent location of the child victim and law enforcement in Nigeria based on the apparent location of the suspect. The following is an excerpt of the reported chat log:

SUSPECT: "Imma send it to all groups your family all school member am gonna post it"

CHILD VICTIM: "Bro your gonna make me kill myself bc of that"

CHILD VICTIM: "I'm being so fr"

SUSPECT: "About to post 📸"

CHILD VICTIM: "Stop stop stop"

SUSPECT: "Pay me"

Florida

In August 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a member of the public relating to an offender located in Florida who was associated with the sadistic online exploitation (SOE) group 764, and potentially was the leader of an extortion ring known as 1378. The reporting individual stated that the offender "preys on children online specifically with mental illnesses and causes them to cut themselves, kill their pets, go on cam and show their genitalia". The reporting individual also shared that child victims who did not comply with the offender's demands were threatened to be "swatted" or to have their personal information leaked. This report was made available to law enforcement in Florida based on the apparent location of the incident.

Hawaii

In August 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram concerning financial sextortion of a minor by an offender who appeared to be located in Cote D'Ivoire, which along with Nigeria is a leading country for offenders engaging in financial sextortion. The offender asked the child victim if they "would like a video of this kind coming from you to be published and your dignity be flouted?" and told the child "[I]f you try to escape, to play hard, to stand or disconnect you will really see what I am capable. So do not try to run away.", and "Try not to finish the call on Facebook, otherwise you are a dead man,

or even to retire as friends on Facebook or even to block me, if you think to do it, you only make worse the situation?"'. This report was made available to law enforcement in Hawaii based on the apparent location of the child victim and law enforcement in Cote D'Ivoire based on the apparent location of the suspect.

Illinois

In April 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram concerning a suspect that blackmailed a child victim with an alleged unclothed image depicting the child and doxxing information. The child victim has appeared in several reports, as recently as September 2025. In these reports, the child victim has been reported as a suspect, child victim, and chat participant among other possible sadistic online exploitation (SOE) associates, with imagery including a lorebook (a collection of sexually explicit/self-harm imagery of the victim and messages between the victim and the offender). The child was blackmailed, including doxxing and swatting, asked to perpetrate a bomb threat, expressed suicidal ideation, and asked to self-harm. These reports were made available to law enforcement in Illinois and Texas when the child victim made a suicide threat.

Iowa

In September 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a victim's parent after their child was contacted via direct message on Instagram by someone requesting a nude image. The child victim shared an image and was blackmailed "5 minutes later." The offender offered to send explicit content if the victim first sent their own image, threatened to share the victim's image if requests to send money to the offender were not complied with, and threatened to bring shame to the victim by sharing the victim's images. This report was made available to law enforcement in Iowa based on the apparent location of the child victim.

Louisiana

In September 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram detailing financial sextortion of a child victim located in Louisiana by a user based in Nigeria. The report contained uploaded files of explicit content and what appeared to be images of the victim's friend list. Sextortion offenders often show their victims a list of the "friends" or users that may receive the child's explicit content if the child does not send money to the offender. The suspect requests \$200, and then another \$100, while the child victim expresses suicidal ideation. Chat logs contained in the report show the offender expressing a sense of urgency, a common tactic to make the child panic and send the requested money. This report was made available to law enforcement in Louisiana and to law enforcement in Nigeria based on the apparent location of the suspect. The following is an excerpt from the chat log included with the report:

SUSPECT: I got all your friends here
 SUSPECT: Am sending your sh*t to 50 of your female friends m
 CHILD VICTIM: Please stop, I'm sorry
 SUSPECT: Get me 200 fast

SUSPECT: And I delete your shit
 SUSPECT: What do you use for payment
 CHILD VICTIM: I have no money!!
 SUSPECT: Pick up fast
 SUSPECT: Fast
 CHILD VICTIM: I'm gonna kill myself
 CHILD VICTIM: I'm gonna kill myself
 SUSPECT: You think am joking 🤪 🤪
 SUSPECT: Watch out
 CHILD VICTIM: Im about to shoot mussels in the head
 SUSPECT: Am sending it to my website rn 202396928

Minnesota

In March 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Facebook detailing sextortion of an apparent minor by an offending account in Nigeria, which along with Cote D'Ivoire, are the countries in which the vast majority of financial sextortion offenders reported to NCMEC's CyberTipline are located. The chat log provided in the report shows the offender encouraging the exchange of exploitative or explicit content and then immediately threatening to post the imagery unless the minor meets the suspect's monetary demands, usually via electronic payments or the purchase of gift cards. This report was made available to law enforcement in Minnesota based on the apparent location of the child victim and to law enforcement in Nigeria based on apparent location of the suspect.

Missouri

In May 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Discord after they were contacted by law enforcement in Missouri concerning a suspect that used similar strategies online as groups involved in sadistic online exploitation (SOE) use to exploit child victims. The child victim discussed issues they were having with their parents, and the suspect validated the child's experience and reciprocated by sharing their own vulnerabilities. The suspect also sought to communicate with the child victim's friends to gain their trust. When faced with disapproval from the friends, the suspect and child victim discussed plans to conceal their relationship. Ultimately, the relationship was used to coerce the child victim to self-harm their genitals. This report was made available to law enforcement in Ohio based on the apparent location of the child victim, and later to law enforcement in Missouri. The following is an excerpt from the chat log included with the report:

CHILD VICTIM: brother you encouraged me to carve "daddys slut" into my fupa.... thats not rllly a good example of treating smn right
 CHILD VICTIM: also youre literally 20. im 17, still a minor
 CHILD VICTIM: youre very lucky im not one of those pedo hunters bc i could report u to the cops rn but i wont
 CHILD VICTIM: bc i believe in recovery and second chances

CHILD VICTIM: you're not a bad guy
 CHILD VICTIM: i know you're better than this
 SUSPECT: Constructive cutting, rather than random. And in my defense, you could have said
 no, but you enjoyed it
 CHILD VICTIM: not really
 CHILD VICTIM: i only did it to make you happy, which i obviously failed to do

New Jersey

In July 2024, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a child victim in New Jersey who stated, "my life is on the line." The child victim detailed persistent exploitation by the suspect which included: extortion over the course of a year, harassment with CSAM of others, enticement to self-harm and commit suicide, leaking of their own explicit imagery, harassment and swatting of their family, calls to child protective services and hotlines, bomb threats to their school, and accessing their online accounts. The child victim reported the suspect's chat logs from three different electronic service providers. Two months later, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a friend of the child victim concerning the same situation. The report was made available to law enforcement in New Jersey based on the location of the child victim and to law enforcement in North Carolina based on the apparent location of the suspect.

North Carolina

In September 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram concerning a suspect located in North Carolina who was engaging in sadistic online exploitation (SOE), including soliciting CSAM and self-harm content from multiple child victims, including one child who discussed suicidal ideation and past attempts to overdose. The chat logs reflect one child victim stating: "i wanna make myself throw up for u and do inappropriate things with [myself] and send u stuff and do whatever u want i will be a really good girl for u and i hope u never leave me or i guess i will just be really sad because i never send nudes a lot and now i send [nudes] and i'll be so attached to u". Another child victim stated: "yeah one of my ex bf said he extorted like a year before being my bf n was "retired" next thing i know i'm being extorted". The suspect and another SOE associate discuss their plans to further exploit both child victims. This report was made available to law enforcement in North Carolina, California, Michigan, and the United Kingdom based on apparent locations of the reported users as well as the FBI.

Rhode Island

In April 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Discord detailing solicitation of self-harm content and enticement for a child to engage in eating disorder behavior. The chat excerpt below shows the offender enticing the child to "starve" themselves:

SUSPECT: "also u gotta like 100% starve more often its cute af"
 CHILD VICTIM: "yes tmrw and the rest of this week I'm going to my parents forced me to eat already"
 SUSPECT: "thats soo boring of them"
 CHILD VICTIM: "ik they so fake that's why they all big"

SUSPECT: "oh dangg they fake"

CHILD VICTIM: "fake for not letting me starve"

SUSPECT: "oh yhh they boring asf LMAOO"

SUSPECT: "good parents would let u do what u want like starve smoke cut do drugs n shi"

The report contains additional chat logs in which the suspect encourages the child victim to purge and track calories and requests for images showing bones beneath body parts, such as a ribcage. This report was made available to law enforcement in Rhode Island based on the apparent location of child victim and to law enforcement in Ireland based on the apparent location of the suspect.

South Carolina

In October 2024, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Instagram concerning a suspect in South Carolina, who blackmailed, requested sexually explicit content and bloodsigns, and cutsigns evidencing self-mutilation, and suggested suicide to child victims. Some child victims may have sent such content and/or expressed suicidal ideation. One child victim offered their passwords and shared their address with the suspect, and another stated, "Imliterly relapsing over ts pls u mean the world to me I just didn't want u to move on please we can talk about this we can fix this Caleb I promise just talk to me". The suspect is also alleged to have "swatted" and leaked personal content relating to other child victims. The suspect's alias appears several times in other CyberTipline reports relating to sadistic online exploitation (SOE) CyberTipline reports and self-harm files. This report was made available to law enforcement agencies in several states, including South Carolina, where an arrest was made, Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, and the FBI.

Tennessee

In November 2024, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Discord regarding a suspect who engaged in sexual conversations with, solicited CSAM from, and repeatedly pressured child victims to self-harm. One child victim said they would create a smaller cut on their skin because they "ALMSOT FAINTED TODAY". To "get back into 764" the suspect instructed the second child victim to self-mutilate and to "start stabbing ur wrists [...] n then let the blood leak everything [...] [expletive] go get a bible and bleed over it". The suspect and child victims frequently discussed and shared images/videos of several other child victims that were blackmailed and enticed to self-harm and take their own lives. This report was made available to law enforcement in Tennessee, New York, and Pennsylvania based on the apparent locations of reported users. The following are excerpts from the chat log included in this report:

SUSPECT: CUT 764 ON UR STOMACH

SUSPECT: then do like

SUSPECT: repent x skin

SUSPECT: on the side

CHILD VICTIM: nah bro what

CHILD VICTIM: -[Expletive] ALL MY OTHER CUTS HAVENT HEALED

[...]
 SUSPECT: your 9yr old brother
 SUSPECT: ur 10 yr oldbrother
 SUSPECT: both in one sign
 CHILD VICTIM: no
 SUSPECT: cut my name into blood
 SUSPECT: then use the blood
 SUSPECT: to
 SUSPECT: write
 SUSPECT: repent is pure evil
 [...]
 SUSPECT: im going to find you
 SUSPECT: kidnap you
 SUSPECT: and rape you everyday
 SUSPECT: for like a few months
 CHILD VICTIM: ok
 SUSPECT: until i get scared of the cops
 SUSPECT: and kill you
 SUSPECT: wait
 SUSPECT: kill you or you just tell the cops you ran away

Texas

In June 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from Discord concerning several individuals involved in sadistic online exploitation (SOE) against child victims. One child victim in Texas was potentially already self-harming before being asked to engage in further self-harm behaviors by the suspect. The victim was told to cut "down the road [...] not across" and to overdose with "as many as u can [...] beacuse u talked to another man". The suspect also sought to isolate the child victim by having them remove online connections and accessing their account(s). The suspect eventually asked the child victim to self-mutilate with "as much blood as possible" and record themselves swallowing numerous pills. This report was made available to law enforcement agencies in multiple states and countries, including Texas, Alabama, California, Illinois, Missouri, Canada, and the United Kingdom based on the apparent location of the users.

Utah

In June 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a child victim relating to a sextortion scam in which the child was enticed to send a nude image to another user. The victim stated that the offender threatened to "send it out over Instagram to my friends and family". The child victim also described being contacted by the offender on "multiple emails" while also receiving calls and texts with continued threats. This report was made available to law enforcement in Utah, who provided feedback indicating an arrest was made, and also to law enforcement in the Philippines based on the apparent location of the suspect.

Vermont

In October 2025, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from the FBI detailing financial sextortion of a minor. The reporting individual appears to be the child victim who disclosed: "I sent nudes to a telegram account that I found on tiktok that was posing as a 17-year-old girl. They threatened to share it to everyone who I follow on tiktok if I did not pay them. I sent them a steam gift card but then they just demanded more money." This report was made available to law enforcement in Vermont based on the apparent location of the child victim.

Good morning, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin and Members of the Committee.

My name is Jessica Lieber Smolar, and I had the honor of serving as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Western District of Pennsylvania for three decades. During my career as a federal prosecutor, I personally handled and oversaw hundreds of child exploitation and human trafficking investigations and prosecutions.

When I first began prosecuting these offenses, investigations often centered around physical evidence and mail-based exchanges. Over time, I witnessed a monumental shift in the types of child sexual abuse material (also referred to as CSAM) that offenders collected and their methods of collection. This shift was not limited to the sheer volume and disturbing nature of the material; it also encompassed the tools offenders used to acquire, share, and conceal CSAM.

Today, every child exploitation case involves the criminal use of cellular phones and computers. Offenders use these tools to stockpile massive quantities of sexually explicit videos and images of children, frequently targeting prepubescent children. Violent depictions of infants and toddlers being sexually exploited were routinely collected by the defendants whom I prosecuted.

Offenders also increasingly use advanced technology and platforms for CSAM trafficking. They congregate in online communities and Darknet forums solely devoted to child exploitation. They can now more easily conceal their crimes and their identities through encryption, VPN's, the Darknet, and remote erasure software.

The law has not kept pace with the rapid technological advances or evolving sex offender behavior. U.S. Sentencing Guideline Section 2G2.2 was designed when CSAM was distributed by mail, so it adds offense enhancements for actions common to all CSAM offenders today—like using a computer, possessing images of prepubescent minors, or amassing many images. The guideline enhancements apply broadly and no longer reflect varying levels of offender culpability or risk. Legislation is needed to amend the CSAM guidelines.

The Sentencing Commission's June 2021 Report found that Section 2G2.2 of the Guidelines is outdated, leading judges to exercise their discretion to reduce sentences for child sexual offenders. The Commission's data for fiscal year 2019 showed that less than 30% of non-production child pornography offenders were sentenced within the recommended guidelines, reflecting broad judicial dissatisfaction and inconsistent sentencing nationwide. As federal prosecutors, my colleagues and I often considered plea offers to binding sentences to avoid the application of the insufficient sentencing guidelines and disparities.

There are also emerging crimes that are not fully covered by existing criminal statutes, such as those committed by members of the violent online group “764.” The 764 members befriend children, sometimes as young as 9 years old, through popular online platforms and then coerce them into escalating sexual, self-destructive and violent behavior – compelling victims to document sex acts, harm siblings and family pets, cut and mutilate themselves, or attempt suicide. There are no federal statutes that adequately criminalize the coercive conduct of 764 and similar groups. As federal prosecutors, we focused on proving more conventional statutory violations, like CSAM possession or production, or distribution of obscenity to minors, to effectively prosecute these horrific crimes.

Similarly, law enforcement agencies have reported a significant rise in sextortion cases- children being coerced into sending sexually explicit images online. Perpetrators engage victims in flirtatious conversation on social media and gaming platforms to obtain explicit images. The offenders then use the sexually compromising images to blackmail victims for more images or, in the case of financial sextortion, for money or gift cards, by threatening to widely publicize the images to the child’s friends and family. Children suffer severe emotional distress as a result of such sexual extortion, and too many have engaged in self-harm or attempted suicide. As federal prosecutors, we found it challenging to effectively charge sextortion and financial sextortion; existing statutes do not adequately address the full scope or severe harm of these crimes.

Increasing public understanding of the evolving and destructive risks to children online is crucial. Legislation is needed to strengthen the legal framework and better support those responsible for protecting children.

I welcome your questions. Thank you.

Senate Judiciary Committee Activity Hearing: Protecting Our Children Online Against the Evolving Offender

December 2025

Our names are Timothy and Tamia Woods, and we are speaking on behalf of our beautiful son, James Timothy Woods. We are adults who continue to live, but James has a forever age of 17 years old. We stand here today, not only as a mother and father, but as a mother and father whose child was taken by something so preventable, so cruel, and so ignored that it should violently shake every person in this room to their core. No child should ever lose their life. And no parent should have to lose their child, especially one who is not an adult yet. The natural order of things throughout history is supposed to be to grow old enough to bury our parents. Not the other way around. Our son James, before he was murdered, was mentally tortured, humiliated and pushed to be a person that he never was. Numerous messages were sent to James throughout the night and morning of the next day, that no person should ever be presented with.

One of the messages sent to James said and we quote:

"I am more determined to rot your life than to make it a waste, a trash can, a shame, a dishonor, a hell, a real disaster, a hell on earth. And I remind you that I am heartless, I have no pity to rot a life as well as yours."

This was one of almost 200 messages sent to our child, over the span of 19.5 hours between November 18" and 19th, 2022. James was the victim of financial sextortion, and though he died by suicide, let's be clear: HE WAS MURDERED!

James in our eyes, is a beautiful young man with a soul like gold. He never set out to hurt anyone. He was a person who tried to make everyone's life around him better. Frowns and sour moods were things that James always would try to reverse. Joy and happiness are what he exuded. James is the helping hand you can still see in real life, guiding, comforting, and lifting others the same way he always did. He would give you the shirt of his back. His compassion for others and his willingness to want better lives for the people around him made him a breath of fresh air in a place with nothing but non-breathable smoke. With his mind, always soaking in information and ever evolving, he could figure out anything as long as he had the information to properly make the right decision. Witty, thoughtful, kind, humble and a whole host of other adjectives that exemplified what a great man should strive to be. He had a smile that lit up any room and eyes as bright as the sun. He asked people how their day was because he genuinely cared. People who truly care about others are part of a population of people that seems to dwindle every day.

He was a high school senior that loved sports and games. He could be seen playing video games with his friends whenever he had free time. Yes, video games have their drawbacks. But James spent hours and hours playing chess. A game that has been around for centuries that he wanted to be better at. James had a competitive side to him. He learned the game at an early age and had a goal of being able to consistently beat his father. James' competitive side boiled over into athletics. He loved to play basketball with his friends and race his mom up and down the street. As it turns out running was something that James really loved. There are 365 days in a year and James could be seen running on every single one of them. It could be snow on the ground or a light rain outside and James will still be there. During the school year, James ran cross-country, indoor track, and outdoor track. The school year isn't where his running ended. James would run all throughout the summer around his whole neighborhood so that he could stay in shape. His neighbors knew who he was because he was always running past them and waving while listening to music in his headphones. James always stated that he had to be ready to run at a moment's notice. James got good enough at track to where he was months away from breaking a 40-year-old school record in the 110 hurdles.

Every time we speak of James, we smile because we're grateful for God letting us borrow His angel for roughly 17 years three months 27 days and seven hours. James was and is the best thing to ever happen to us. He was unproblematic, independent, strong willed, and determined. God truly created a being of pure good. We had plans of watching James go off to college to attain a degree in law. He wanted to continue helping people as an adult like he did as a child. He even knew which school he wanted to attend while getting his higher education. We knew that one day he was going to practice law. James' wants and goals was something that we were looking forward to. For James to have his own house. His own family. His own career. **His own ups and downs.** We couldn't wait to see it all. Now, with James no longer here, we live in misery. Every day, we are also angry, sorrowful, depressed, full of regret, and grieving. Uncertainty is what our future now holds.

James was our only child. We knew early on that we couldn't have anymore. With that knowledge, we set out to make sure that James had everything going forward. We gave our lives so that James could be great and it was taken from us by people whose only goal was to mentally torture people into giving them money.

A woman online befriended James on Instagram. She contacted him shortly after 7 p.m. on Friday November 18, 2022. She created what every predator knows how to build: a safe space. She made him feel comfortable, seen, liked. She groomed him. Then she asked if he wanted to see her unclothed. She exposed herself. She asked him to do the same. And like any innocent 17-year-old boy who liked a girl and saw no danger - he did.

That moment she created became their weapon. Then the attackers came. Not one person. We believe at least four. For nearly 20 hours, they attacked, threatened, terrorized, and dismantled our child. Every time he asked, "Why are you doing this to me?" and begged "Please leave me alone", they sent a nude picture. Every time he tried to fight back, they escalated the situation by threatening to send his image to friends and family, telling him that he'd be labeled a pedophile, that he would be expelled from school, that he wouldn't get into college, that he wouldn't be able to get a job, that his friends and family wouldn't love him anymore. Telling him his future was over. The most damning thing that they told James was:

"You should just kill yourself."

What kind of monster would forcefully propel anyone in that direction? Especially a child? And in James' last moments, our son who had everything to live for, felt he had no other choice. A day that started with laughter, college plans, and joy ended with us finding our child, our future, our life's work unalive in our home in the early evening. No parent should ever enter a room and see that.

We stand here because 19 ½ hours is not a short time in the digital world. It is a lifetime.

It is enough time for someone:

- To intervene,
- To flag the account,
- To cancel the messages,
- To report the behavior.

Yet no one stepped in!

No system protected him. No platform stopped it. To us this is disheartening information. Meta has features that flag all inappropriate language that we use when making a post. And it happens almost instantaneously. With all the billions of people who use these applications there can't be a person who monitors everything, so everything has to be reviewed by a computer. So why is it that when we interact through direct messaging a computer isn't monitoring the words and phrases used privately? The system that is used to monitor what goes on our public feeds should be the same system that monitors what is being said in private. We find this unacceptable and negligent. To allow someone to be harmed because it is deemed "private" tells us that as long as it's not in your face it's acceptable. These murderers that are in the Ivory Coast attacked our son for a financial gain while Meta allowed for our son to be attacked for their financial gain. Disgusting! Deplorable! Disgraceful! There are tons of studies that show how social media rots the brain, especially

in adolescence. For there not to be measures that protect people while there are algorithms being used to create junkies to this thing called the Internet shows a lack of compassion.

So, we created the Do It for James Foundation. Since the day James died, November 19, 2022, we have not stopped fighting against the mental oppression that is being placed on the world. We speak, teach, train, and fight so no other parent has to feel the pain that sits in our heart every single moment of every single day.

In 2023, Ohio created the Social Media Parental Notification Act, requiring platforms to get parental consent for children under 16. It passed unanimously. However, when it came time to implement it, the state was sued by NetChoice claiming the law violated the First Amendment Rights of our children.

Large corporations continue to argue for rights while refusing to take responsibility. We are asking you Senators to put laws in place that give us multiple avenues to protect our kids and hold these applications accountable for the damage that they do to the world. Because...

- parental controls alone are not enough.
- "Click here to opt out at age 13" is not protection.
- Predators thrive when the risk is low, but the reward is high.
- These criminals are making billions by exploiting our children. • Because we tell parents, "Monitor your kids better," while platforms refuse to monitor predators at all.

What is monitored is what is done in front of the public, not what is done behind closed doors. That is unfair. Especially when brain development isn't at a point where it can properly protect its host.

How dare we let the blame land on victims while the criminals walk free? Since there is no extradition treaty with the Ivory Coast, we will never see justice for what was done to us. Yes, James is the one that lost his life but us that remain suffered also and continue to do so every waking day.

Today, instead of checking on James' homework, instead of mailing him care packages to his college dorm, cheering for him at track meets, having holiday get togethers, watching him wash his laundry, instead of having him raid our refrigerator, we must hold a picture. A picture that can't hug us back. A picture that can't tell us it loves us. A picture that can't share its new experiences with us. A picture that can't remind us that our hard work and efforts throughout the decades was worth it. Pictures and memories are all that we have

left. Seventeen and a half years of God given pleasures that we should've had for the rest of our lives, was taken away to where no new ones will ever come about.

So, we are asking you, no, we are begging you to stand with us. Stand up! Do something!

Use your power to help us save other children's lives. Help us save other parents and guardians, caregivers, friends and relatives from the heartache that comes from losing a loved one. We may not be able to save them all. But with the right laws, with accountability, with real consequences, we can make it harder for predators to win. So what if the owners and shareholders of these online applications don't get to take that extra trip to their favorite vacation destinations or get to purchase the newest version of their favorite vehicle. People's lives are literally at stake here.

We are not alone in this pain, far too many families share this unimaginable heartbreak. This video holds the names and faces of more than 30 boys who were also targeted and tortured, and whose parents now carry a grief that never leaves. Please take a moment to honor them... read their names, see their faces, and recognize the lives that should still be here with us today.



With your help we can make it harder for another parent to bury their child. Sextortion, grooming and online enticement shouldn't be so easily accomplished. Please. Do it for James. Do it for every child whose name we never got the chance to learn. Most of all, do it to help make the world a better place. We know that your jobs are difficult and what we're asking isn't easily achievable, but you are in a position that we aren't so we have to plead to you to do something that would be for the betterment of others.

We are greatly appreciative for the time that you have invested in this matter.

Timothy and Tamia Woods

A P P E N D I X

The following submissions are available at:

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

Submitted by Chairman Grassley:

Grueser, Dana, letter	2
Tricia, Levi's Mother, letter	4
Montgomery, Brian and Courtney, letter	7
Zimmer, Amanda, letter	9

