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To: House Education Committee
From: Christopher Dodson, Co-Director
Subject: Senate Concurrent Resolution 4017
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The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 4017 which would recognize pornography as a public health hazard.

Pornography is pervasive in society today, largely due to easy access to online porn through technological devices. It is estimated that roughly 25% of all internet searches are porn-related, and around 68 million porn searches are done each day. It is also estimated that around 30% of all internet websites are now pornographic. Up to 42% of women and 80% of men in the United States watched pornography within the last year.

Pornography is big business. Annual revenues from pornography worldwide are estimated to be around \$97 billion per year, and annual revenues in the United States are around \$13 billion per year. To put this in context, the total revenue generated by pornography each year exceeds the combined revenues each year of Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple, and Netflix.

Consuming pornography is often considered a harmless act without consequences. But this is wrong. The harmful effects of pornography are so extensive today that it could be characterized as an epidemic:

- *Degrades the Person/Distorts Sexuality* Pornography objectifies people and treats them as sexual objects in violation of their dignity. It also distorts human sexuality from being an intimate and sacred expression of love between spouses into a form of recreation in which persons are used for sexual pleasure.
- *Addiction* Pornography is highly addictive, with around 10% of all adults admitting to having a porn addiction, and the numbers are rising. One recent study found that 11% of men and 3% of women reported that they were addicted to pornography. This has led to isolation, shame, guilt, and feelings of hopelessness. Porn addiction also often leads to promiscuity, risky sexual behavior, and sometimes criminal sexual activity.
- *Sex Trafficking/Commercial Sex Exploitation* Shared Hope International, an organization working to end sex trafficking, says that pornography is now the primary gateway for purchasing human beings for commercial sex. Frequent male users of pornography are significantly more likely to have sold and purchased other people for sex than other males of the same age. Alarming, child pornography is now one of the fastest growing forms of pornography.

- Divorce/Harm to Marriages The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers reports 56% of divorces involve one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites. Even in those marriages that do not end in divorce, the innocent spouse who discovers a husband or wife using pornography reports feeling deceived, betrayed, and having a sense of trauma. Data also indicates husbands and wives who use pornography are more likely to have an extramarital affair.
- Harm to Children Pornography destroys a child's innocence. The average age of first exposure to pornography is now 9 years of age, and an estimated 90% of kids ages 8-16 today have viewed pornography online. Porn viewing by adolescents is associated with poor academic performance and mental health issues. Early exposure by children to pornography also leads to a greater likelihood of developing an addiction, sexually abusing another child, and having a greater risk of sexually aggressive behavior later in life.
- Harm to Actors Beyond objectifying themselves and others, and degrading the sanctity of human sexuality, porn actors face serious health risks, such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases and high rates of drug and alcohol abuse.

The Catholic Church is resolute in its condemnation of pornography. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states "Pornography ... does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials" (CCC 2354). Pope Francis has also warned that pornography can lead to addiction and "satisfaction without relationship," and recently referred to pornography as "a language of the devil." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been so concerned about the corrosive effects of pornography in people's lives that it issued a lengthy pastoral letter to address the problem, *Create in Me a Clean Heart*.

Recognizing the tremendous harm caused by pornography, eighteen states since 2016 have declared pornography to be a public health crisis (AK, AL, AZ, FL, ID, KS, KY, LA, MO, MT, OH, OK, PA, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA). It would be an important first step in combatting the scourge of pornography in our state for North Dakota to do the same.

We urge a **Do Pass** recommendation on Senate Concurrent Resolution 4017.