

Dear Chairman Klemin (Kla - MEEN) and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name's John Begeman. I'm 27 and I currently live in Portland, Oregon.

But I grew up in Selby, South Dakota, population 642, on a farm/ranch and had a wonderful childhood full of love and opportunities to become all God had created me to be.

But at the age of nine I was exposed to online pornography as my mom and I were doing a homework assignment on the one family computer. We were looking for a photo of a flower for a class assignment when an image of a topless woman appeared amidst the Google search. My mother quickly scrolled away as I asked, "what was that?" She replied, "Nothing you need to see."

I was confused and curious. So I went back and found the image, and as I did my mom found me and responded in a lot of anger and fear.

Looking back I can now see that I learned 3 things that day:

1. Sexuality is bad.
2. I am bad if I engage in it.
3. So hide.

This was my first, memorable experience of porn and the shame that ensued.

Then at the age of 13, I was given the best and worst gift of my life – an iPod Touch.

Which became a porn shop in my pocket as I went back to porn as a minor using: Google images, YouTube videos and clicking random links until I came across hardcore porn (videos) for the first time.

I quickly became addicted to porn and began living two lives, that of the perfect son my parents had raised and an addict behind closed doors. Porn drove me into isolation and secrecy and kept me from the people I loved most because I believed:

- I was the only one struggling with addiction
- And no one would love me if they knew

I was hopeless and slowly dying socially.

It wasn't until I was 16 that my parents found out.

Through tears I shared about my addiction and my dad committed to helping me, but I fell back into using porn to end high school.

Hope faded and I thought I would be an addict the rest of my life.

But God, in His kindness, didn't give up on me. In fact, He was working on my restoration long before I knew I needed it.

While attending a summer camp before college a camp counselor shared his story of porn addiction with our small group, which gave me the courage to **share my story for the first time** with others.

To my shock, **5 out of the 6 guys in the room had the exact same story.** My heart broke and I committed to doing something about this injustice in our world.

I left that room righteously angry knowing that others were struggling in silence too.

It was at that camp in Colorado that God began restoring my life and identity.

I got home and told my parents my story because **I didn't want this to be my three younger brothers stories.** That's why I'm here this morning. Because we have the chance to protect the next generation from destructive, addictive, harmful online pornography.

The next generation deserves better.

They deserve a better story of the goodness of their bodies and the good gift of sexuality that doesn't look like abuse, violence, exploitation or human trafficking.

I now work for a nonprofit called Pure Desire that helps men and women out of pornography addiction and betrayal trauma.

We believe that the road of healing is a 2-5 year process of rewiring the brain.

Why?

Because PET scans of the damage to the brain from cocaine use and porn are very similar.

This is so much more than just a moral problem, this is a brain problem.

In the same way that the state of North Dakota views cocaine as a Scheduled II controlled substance, I would implore you to see pornography the same way.

My healing journey truly began in 2020 as I began to meet in a Pure Desire group weekly, and it was here that after struggling with porn monthly from age 13-22 that I went 10 months without using porn for the first time. I didn't know that was possible.

It took a commitment to the equivalent of an AA group for me to really find traction and freedom from this substance called porn that had taken so many years of my life.

I have now been sober from porn for 5 years and have been leading groups weekly fighting for other Gen Z to find freedom from crippling porn addictions.

It's hard work, but I won't stop because I believe all men and women deserve a life of freedom!

I would like to end with some stats as just last year (2024) we at Pure Desire commissioned research with the Barna Group titled *Beyond the Porn Phenomenon* which revealed that:

- 61% of US adults report viewing pornography
- 70.5% of Gen Z (male/female) are using porn at least occasionally.

Other studies show:

- The majority of young people are exposed to porn by the age of 13.
- 88.2% of pornography is violent.

This is a pandemic and the **Digital Age Assurance Act** has a profound opportunity to protect the next generation from the dangerous harms of pornography.

If that wasn't enough, I want to leave you with a quote from **Pornhub's** annual review a couple years ago where they said,

"If we have a customer by the age of 11, we'll have a life long customer"

I implore you to see an 11 year-old as a CHILD, not a customer, that is worth protecting.

I believe in a world where destructive, violent pornography is no longer the sexual educator of kids, rather safe, educated parents!

I urge a DO PASS on Senate Bill 2380.

Thank you.

I stand for questions.