

Senate Industry and Business Committee

House Bill 1561

Testimony In Favor

Anna Frissell

Youthworks and Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota

Honorable Chairman Barta, distinguished members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Anna Frissell and I am here today as a representative of the Board of Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota and an employee of Youthworks of North Dakota, as well as, a member of the Legislative Task Force for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse. Finally, I am a past Executive Director of a North Dakota Children's Advocacy Center and a former North Dakota and Minnesota prosecutor. I am testifying in support of House Bill 1561.

The organizations that I represent work very hard to protect and heal children from injuries caused by the acts done to them by others. House Bill 1561 is an opportunity to set up a barrier between our children and pornographic material, by requiring commercial entities to verify the age of anyone accessing explicit sexual material to be at least 18 years of age. House Bill 1561 is a tool in our arsenal to protect kids from exposure to the publishing and distribution of harmful sexually explicit content.

At the February 4, 2025, House Judiciary hearing on this bill, Rebecca Preussler, Board Certified Pediatric Psychologist, Sanford, shared with the Committee that 73 percent of adolescents aged 13-17 reported seeing pornography online and 15 per cent said they saw it for the first time at age 10 or younger.

There is much research about the harm done to children from exposure to pornography, or sexually explicit material. Research tells us that early exposure to sexually explicit material leads to many negative problems for kids, including disruptive behaviors, anxiety, depression, and early, risky sexual activity, even

suicide attempts (Early Exposure to Pornography: A Form of Sexual Trauma, Journal of Psychiatry Reform, Vol. 10, #15, December 7, 2021).

At Children's Advocacy Centers, we see many situations where children are engaged in risky, problematic sexual behavior at young ages. Granted, one cannot always conclude that there is one identifiable "cause" for the behavior but exposure to sexually explicit material certainly may be involved.

In an article entitled, The Impact of Pornography on Children, pub. American College of Pediatricians, August 2004, the author noted, "that over the past decade there has been a large increase in the pornographic material that is available to adults and children". The article goes on to discuss the high number of youth exposed to pornography and its potential impact on these kids, not only those impacts mentioned above, but also that prolonged exposure to pornography can increase maladaptive sexual behavior, including sexually abusing children.

In the article mentioned above entitled, Early Exposure to Pornography: A Form of Sexual Trauma, the author opines the exposure to sexually explicit material by a young mind can cause trauma, leading to long-term problems like those mentioned earlier (depression, anxiety, etc.) and, ultimately leading to the need for psychotherapy or other interventions. It is difficult to generalize the consequences for all children and their families from the exposure to sexually explicit material, but we know there is an actual cost for interventions to try and help the child through the harm resulting from the exposure and research supports that the consequences can be severe.

I know of an adult male who had exposure to pornography at an early age. He said he spent his elementary and middle school years with access to sexually explicit material on his home computer when his parents thought he was studying. He reports as an adult to having difficulty with interpersonal relationships, self-esteem and self-loathing. I am not a therapist so I may be

over-simplifying his situation. I do know that he feels in adulthood he is paying a heavy price for those early years of unregulated access to sexually explicit material.

I believe that everyone has felt some concern about the content that their children or grandchildren can access on computers. I also know that some people feel that parents should monitor the online access of their children, and if so, laws like this would not be necessary. It is important to remember that if this bill passes, parents will still need to interact with their children about accessing computer information, and hopefully, give their kids the building blocks to make good decisions when away from home or as young adults. However, the statistics that Dr. Preussler testified to demonstrate that access to sexually explicit material on a computer by young children is not easy for parents to monitor and stop and the easy access to sexually explicit material is a pervasive and serious problem.

I want to thank the bill sponsor, Representative Swiontek, and co-sponsors, for presenting the legislature with an opportunity to attack this societal problem, using civil penalties to provide remedies or financial redress for the wrongs done when there is unregulated access to sexually explicit material by our young children