



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1561

Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1561, a commonsense and urgently needed piece of legislation that establishes reasonable safeguards to protect children from the harmful and pervasive influence of sexually explicit material on the internet.

As written, HB 1561 requires commercial websites that host content harmful to minors to implement reasonable age verification methods before granting access. It also provides civil recourse for parents and individuals when these protections are not honored.

This bill is not an attempt at censorship. It is a targeted and constitutionally sound effort to hold accountable commercial entities that knowingly profit from hosting or distributing content that is inappropriate and damaging to children—content that is far too easily accessed online with no gatekeeping whatsoever.

As a society, we recognize that children are vulnerable and impressionable. We restrict access to alcohol, tobacco, and even PG-13 and R-rated movies—yet we allow unfettered access to pornographic websites that often contain far more explicit and degrading material. Research has consistently shown that early exposure to such content can have lasting negative impacts on a child's mental, emotional, and relational development, contributing to issues like body image distortion, unhealthy sexual expectations, addiction, and increased risk of sexual exploitation.

Importantly, this bill also gives parents a legal avenue to seek justice if their children are harmed due to noncompliance, something currently lacking in our legal framework.

Children deserve better than a digital landscape where multimillion-dollar companies profit from their exposure to graphic content without consequence. Just as we expect brick-and-mortar establishments to check ID before selling age-restricted material, it is both reasonable and necessary to expect digital content distributors to do the same.

I respectfully urge you to give this bill a "DO PASS" recommendation, and help North Dakota lead the way in protecting our youth and restoring accountability in our online spaces.

Brandon Prichard