

Dear Chairman Barta and members of the Industry and Business 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 30 minutes later, I went back upstairs breaking our family rule of not using the computer alone. I found the image, and as I did my mom walked up the stairs behind me to find me looking at the image again and responded quickly in anger. In honor, she wasn't prepared or equipped to respond in that moment, but in honesty it resulted in immense shame.

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

1. Whatever that was is bad.
2. If I go back, I am bad.
3. So, if I go back, she can never know.

This was my first, memorable experience of shame.

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

This promised freedom to the world, but only led to slavery as I went back to searching for online pornography as a minor using: Google images, YouTube videos and clicking random links until I came across hardcore porn (videos) for the first time.

Here as a Seventh Grader, I quickly became addicted to pornography and began living two lives, that of the Christian son my parents had raised and an addict behind closed doors. Experimenting with lust, fantasy and masturbation became a nightly experience. I knew that I was supposed to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), but yet I continued to do the very thing I hated. Pornography drove me into isolation and secrecy and kept me from the people I loved as I believed that:

- I was the only one.
- And no one would love me if they knew

It wasn't until I was a Sophomore in High School (16) that my parents found out.

I had written a prayer asking God to give me the courage to tell my father I watched pornography. Two weeks later he picked up the book, opened to the page, read my prayer silently, looked up at me, and asked if I watched people having sex.

Through tears I confessed my struggle and looked into the eyes of disappointment and rejection I had been running away from for four years. He committed to helping me and holding me accountable, but I fell back into using pornography to end high school. Hope faded and I thought I would be an addict the rest of my life.

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

After graduating high school, I attended a worldview conference called Summit Ministries in Colorado where Sean McDowell presented on the topic of pornography in the church. He shared that:

- 67% of Christian men struggle with porn
- 33% of Christian women
- and 25% of Internet searches were for pornography.

I seemingly couldn't believe what he was saying because I thought I was alone. I thought I was the only Christian man struggling. Nobody had ever talked about this.

Until that evening when we broke up into small groups and shared stories. The summer staff member, a college student, went first and shared his story of struggling with porn.

That moment shattered the lie that I was alone, and I shared my story next for the first time with others. Only to be followed by the rest of the room. Five out of the six guys 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, as I realized that I had believed a lie for 6 years and that I was alone.

It was at that two-week camp in Colorado that God performed heart surgery, removing my heart of stone and placing in me a heart of flesh and a new spirit. (Eze. 36:26) The old began to pass away, and the new began to come. (2 Cor. 5:17) Praise God for new life and redemption!

I called my dad from camp and gave him an update that I wanted to be free from porn. So when I got home from camp, my mother installed **Accountable2You** on all devices in our house. I told my parents everything because though this was my story, it didn't have to be my three younger brothers. That summer I spent a lot of time on the phone calling other guys my age and telling them what God had done in my life and that there was freedom from pornography and healing on offer.

That summer I wrote on a 9x5 card a big dream - **that God would use me to speak out against pornography and change the way the world viewed it.**

During my three years at South Dakota State University studying communication, I joined an accountability group, stepped into leadership with two different campus ministries, and even led a purity group my senior year.

During college, I interned at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs where I blogged openly about my story of addiction to pornography and the healing I had found through Jesus.

I graduated college in 2019 and moved to Dallas, TX, to work with Josh McDowell Ministry (a Campus Crusade for Christ apologetic ministry). It was here in the application process that I shared my story of pornography addiction and they required me to join an online recovery group through Pure Desire Ministries!

It was during this weekly meeting in 2020 that I began to see that porn wasn't my problem, it was my poor solution to the pain that I was running from.

It was that pain that God wanted to heal, but I had to be honest enough to reveal it in order for Him to heal it.

I named the most painful moments of my life and began to see that the roots of my struggle with pornography were so much deeper than simply 'not loving Jesus enough'. I had been hurt in relationship and it was in relationship with God and others I began to find healing and freedom.

I had never been more than one month without sexually acting out (porn use or masturbation) and it was here that I went 10 months without relapsing. I didn't know freedom like that was possible!

At the start of 2021, my friend and I launched two online Pure Desire groups for young adult men to find healing from pornography addiction, and we began to watch God heal and set other men free!

My friend and I dreamed of what God might do to set our entire generation free from porn and pitched the idea to the **Tim Tebow Foundation**. Those conversations then led us to connect with **Pure Desire** which is where I now work raising money to see men, women, and children protected, healed, and set free from porn addiction.

Last year (2024) we 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.