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**Testimony of Jill Manning, Ph.D., LMFT, CCPS, EMDR, CCTP, BH-TMH**

Licensed Marital & Family Therapist and Researcher

February 10, 2025, 10:00 AM Central (Remote Testimony)

Before the House Industry and Business Committee

Senate Bill 2380: Requiring Age-Verification to Access Obscene Materials Online

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**Chairman Barta and members of the Industry and Business Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 2380.

I am Dr. Jill Manning, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in the impacts of pornography and sexual betrayal on individuals and families.

Drawing upon twenty-five years of clinical and research experience, I testify as a clinician, researcher, mother of teens, and mental health advocate.

We face an alarming reality: *underage pornography exposure is now the norm* (Carroll et al., 2025).

The Internet has not only made obscene content accessible to children, but it also actively *pushes* it into their lives through algorithms, tracking cookies, and deceptive marketing—targeting them before they have a chance to think or to choose (Carroll et al., 2025; Manning, 2005). Between 58 and 66 percent of adolescents report encountering pornography *unintentionally* due to these violating and profit-driven tactics (Carroll et al., 2025; Mori et al., 2023; Common Sense Media, 2022; Braun-Courville, 2009).

Yet, decades of peer-reviewed research (Carroll et al., 2025; Owen et al., 2012; Manning, 2006) confirm that early exposure to pornography has severe and lasting consequences.

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### **Documented Harms of Pornography Exposure on Youth**

To underscore the urgency of this issue, I will highlight five categories of harm—which studies show adults grossly underestimate (Wright et al., 2023).

## **1. Neurological Development:**

- Exposure to pornography structurally alters brain regions responsible for impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation while also decreasing grey matter volume in the prefrontal cortex (Brief of Amici Curiae Scholars, 2024; Kühn et al., 2014; Draps et al., 2020).
- These structural changes then increase susceptibility to compulsive behaviors, including addiction (Brief of Amici Curiae Scholars, 2024).

## **2. Cognitive and Behavioral Risks:**

- Pornography normalizes aggression and misogyny, especially when violent content is consumed (Manning, 2006), and *most* mainstream pornography *is* violent according to content analyses (Bridges et al., 2012).
- It also normalizes promiscuity and sexual violence (Manning, 2006), leading children to mimic what they see. A recent report out of the U.K. reveals children are now the largest group of perpetrators of sexual abuse against children, with pornography identified as the leading factor in the quadrupling of such offenses in recent years (The Guardian, 2024).
- Additionally, exposure fosters mechanical views of sex and triggers earlier sexual initiation, increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections over the lifespan (Manning, 2006), and relational dissatisfaction in adulthood (Willoughby et al., 2022).

## **3. Emotional and Relational Harms:**

- Early exposure reduces empathy while increasing relational aggression and narcissistic tendencies (Kasper et al., 2014; Manning, 2006).
- It lowers self-esteem, distorts body image, and diminishes the ability to form secure attachments (Owen et al., 2012; Manning, 2006).

## **4. Mental Health Consequences:**

- Pornography consumption correlates with higher rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, delinquent behaviors, suicidality, and lower life satisfaction (Altin et al., 2024; McGraw et al., 2024; Owen et al., 2012).

## 5. Academic Performance:

- Research links pornography use to impaired academic performance by disrupting attention, reducing focus, and slowing cognitive function (Šević et al., 2019; Beyens et al., 2015).

Each of these harms reflect a grave failure to protect the well-being of our youth.

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## Expert Warnings on the Harm to Developing Brains

In a recent Amicus Brief submitted in an age-verification case heard by the Supreme Court last month, neurosurgeon Dr. Donald Hilton and biological psychology professor Dr. Frederick Toates stated:

*“Childhood is the exact worst time for someone to be exposed to pornography... The weight of medical evidence demonstrates pornography can become both addictive and compulsive... The compulsive and addictive potential of pornography is a serious public health issue—most dangerous for young people, who are most susceptible... (Brief of Amici Curiae Scholars, 2024).”*

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## Why Senate Bill 2380 Is Essential

A 2018 study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (Dickenson et al., 2018) found that 8.6 percent of American adults struggle with compulsive sexual behaviors and urges, the majority of whom were first exposed to pornography as minors. This means one in every 11.6 adults struggles with sexual compulsivity.

As a clinician, I have assessed and treated hundreds of children, teens, and adults harmed directly and indirectly by pornography exposure. I have yet to meet a sexually compulsive adult who did not begin consuming this material in their youth.

Since my testimony before a federal Senate Sub-Committee in 2005 (Manning, 2025), I have observed this situation worsening. The rise of smartphones and coarsening genres of pornography have contributed to a nearly threefold increase

in compulsive sexual behavior over the last twenty years (Carnes, 2010; Dickenson et al., 2018).

Protecting minors from obscenity is not “censorship” or “moral panic” but a fundamental responsibility of adults. The long-established practice of rating, restricting, and monitoring media for age appropriateness—as is done with radio, film, video games, and television (Solas, 2023)—is both reasonable and widely supported (Rasmussen Reports, 2022).

***Comparing the harm inflicted on minors to a minor delay or inconvenience for adults is a false equivalency.***

Passing Senate Bill 2380 is a long-overdue step toward aligning policy with today’s digital reality and to protect the health and safety of our youth.

As a result, I urge a DO PASS on Senate Bill 2380.

Thank you.

I stand for questions.

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