

Good morning Chairman Barta and members of the Industry and Business Committee-

My name is Maggie Blaylock, and I am a Licensed professional counselor (LPC-MH) in the state of South Dakota. I am also a Certified Sexual Addictions Therapist (CSAT) and a Certified Multiple Addictions Therapist (CMAT). I own a private practice in Sioux Falls, SD. In my practice and with my specialty I work daily with the devastation of the aftermath on individual lives and marriages because of sexual addiction. In almost every case I work with, pornography use was an originating factor in their addiction.

Sadly, I became a licensed and trained professional because 13 years ago my own marriage was devastated by sexual addiction. My husband was the child of a pastor, and his parents tried very hard to monitor the content that he consumed. Unfortunately, he had access to porn he found at his grandparents' home and at a friend's house. When high speed internet hit while he was in college this behavior turned into a major addiction in his life until he eventually could no longer hide it. I became a trained professional because there were no local therapists in my state dealing with such complex issues at the time. We had to travel to Colorado to find someone skilled enough to know how to help us get into recovery and eventually repair our broken relationship. Sadly, today, I am only 1 of 2 CSATs in my state and last I checked there more recently is one CSAT in North Dakota. Before there was a trained professional in North Dakota I have had clients who drive down into the state of SD to a location that they can find wifi to work with me.

I want to take a minute to share a story with you guys from a client I have worked with. Sadly, this story is very common, and I have heard it many times before. This client came to me as a young adult who was newly married and having a difficult time stopping his compulsive use of pornography. It was wrecking his new marriage, and he was nearly suicidal. He was a local businessman and on paper very successful. He was an active member of his church. I enjoyed working with him because he was really a great guy who deeply wanted to do the right things in life. His history with pornography began when he was in the 5th grade, and he overheard a kid in his Christian school talking about sex using a slang term. This young boy did not know what this word was, and he was very developmentally appropriately curious. This curiosity led him to google the word and was first exposed to pornography. This caused normal curiosity to eventually become a repeated pattern of behavior that eventually turned into a full-blown sexual addiction.

While I primarily work with adults and the significant effects of pornography in their lives, its impact on children is particularly alarming. Research and clinical experience have shown that early exposure to pornography can shape a child's developing brain in harmful ways. Studies indicate that children who consume pornography at a young age are at greater risk for developing distorted views of sex, relationships, and consent. They are more likely to experience increased anxiety, depression, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships later in life. Repeated exposure can also desensitize young minds, leading to compulsive behaviors and, in some cases, addiction.

Furthermore, pornography often depicts unrealistic and even violent portrayals of sex, reinforcing unhealthy ideas about gender roles and consent. When children are exposed to such content without proper context or guidance, they may internalize damaging messages that influence their behavior and expectations in relationships. This not only puts their emotional and psychological well-being at risk but also increases the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviors at an early age.

One of the most effective ways to protect children from the harmful effects of pornography is through age verification measures. The internet has made pornographic content more accessible than ever, and without safeguards, children can stumble upon or actively seek out this material with little to no barriers. Implementing strict age verification for pornographic websites is a critical step in creating a safer online environment—one that helps shield young minds from premature exposure to material that can have lifelong consequences.

Age verification does not aim to restrict adult access to legal content; rather, it serves to ensure that children are given the protection they deserve. Just as we implement age restrictions for alcohol, tobacco, and gambling to safeguard minors, we must apply the same logic to online pornography. This measure is not about censorship, it is about responsibility.

As a professional who has worked with individuals struggling with compulsive sexual behaviors, I strongly support age verification as a practical, necessary, and long-overdue step toward protecting our children's mental, emotional, and relational well-being. It is our duty as a society to provide safeguards that allow young people to develop healthy perspectives on relationships and intimacy without the distortions caused by premature exposure to pornography.

By voting for SB 2380 you are choosing to prioritize the safety and healthy development of your children over the convenience of unrestricted access to explicit content. This is a step forward in protecting future generations from the harm that I, and many other professionals in this field, see far too often.