

Testimony of Ilonka Deaton Before the Judiciary Committee
Regarding the Removal of the Obscenity Exemption

Chairperson, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ilonka Deaton, and I come before you as a survivor of sex trafficking, an advocate for the protection of children, and a board member of the Reisman Institute, an organization dedicated to exposing the harms of sexual exploitation.

I was trafficked for six years as a child within the music industry. My trafficker—a trusted adult—used pornography as both a grooming tool and a justification for my abuse. Early exposure to sexually explicit materials rewired my perception of normalcy, distorting my understanding of love, safety, and consent. It was not just an introduction to obscenity—it was a form of psychological entrapment that ensured my silence and compliance.

This is why we must address the obscenity exemption in our laws. Right now, sexually explicit materials that would be considered obscene in any other setting are being shielded under legal loopholes when placed in schools and libraries. These materials, often presented under the guise of education or artistic expression, normalize sexual content for minors, desensitize them to exploitation, and make them more vulnerable to predators. We know that traffickers and abusers rely on this normalization to manipulate and groom their victims, just as mine did to me.

I have spent years educating lawmakers, parents, and communities about the direct correlation between early exposure to pornography and increased vulnerability to trafficking. The presence of sexually explicit material in institutions meant to educate and protect children is not just inappropriate—it is dangerous. It places children at risk and creates a breeding ground for exploitation.

I urge this committee to eliminate the obscenity exemption and apply the same standard of protection to our libraries and schools that we demand in every other public space. No adult should have legal immunity for exposing children to material that warps their development and makes them targets for abuse. The same protections that keep explicit content out of workplaces, public billboards, and mainstream broadcasting should extend to the spaces where children learn and grow.

The choices you make today are not just about policy—they are about whether we allow our children to be primed for abuse or protected from it. I urge you to take action.

Ilonka Deaton