

April 7, 2021

Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics  
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6  
Canada

Dear Members of the Committee,

Over the past few months, we've watched with great concern as legislators in Canada have targeted legal adult performers and businesses, unwittingly carrying out a censorship campaign organized by religious evangelical organizations from the US.

Christian evangelicals such as Laila Mickelwait and Benjamin Nolot of Exodus Cry, and religious extremists like Dawn Hawkins of NCOSE (formerly Morality in Media) have spent the past year working to shut down adult platforms like Pornhub and ban adult content on social media sites like Twitter. They claim that these platforms actively conspire, or at the very least, are complicit, with the distribution of revenge porn and child sex abuse material (CSAM). It's a compelling story — seemingly supported by a flurry of dubious lawsuits and sensational claims — but not supported by facts.

Revenge porn and CSAM are an internet-wide problem. We know that with each incident, lives are destroyed. The witnesses who have spoken before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in the House of Commons are testament to that. Anyone who participated in that abuse, or shares intimate images non-consensual should be punished.

But contrary to the broad claims made by these religious organizations, incidents like these are not limited to or even particularly endemic to adult sites. In a world where digital files can be shared with the click of a button, it's a problem that plagues everyone from Facebook to Dropbox. In fact, despite the heated rhetoric, the adult industry has been more aggressive and effective than its mainstream counterparts in moderating and blocking such content. Data consistently shows that adult platforms have drastically lower incidences of revenge and CSAM content than mainstream social media sites.

The #Traffickinghub campaign has been unconcerned with facts, and deaf to the complaints of sex workers whose lives it has devastated. Broad calls for censorship hit marginalized communities the hardest. Hundreds of thousands of independent adult content creators depend on these platforms, and it's these workers who are most vulnerable in a moral panic.

If we really want to stop revenge porn and CSAM, MPs need work with adult platforms and creators — not against them. We understand the problem, we understand the technology, and we know what is and isn't effective. The adult industry has been at the forefront of this fight for decades — establishing the first cybertip line, working with law enforcement, and developing advanced protocols for identification, blocking, reporting and removal of such content.

Pornhub, the target of so much fire in the hearings, now has the most sophisticated and effective system for blocking and reporting content of any major internet platform. It's a model for the future, not a cautionary tale. But that hasn't lessened the calls of Exodus Cry or NCOSE calls to shut it down.

No system is perfect, and that makes a platform like Pornhub an easy target — especially if the ultimate goal is to ban sexual content entirely. The same groups financing the #Traffickinghub campaign are simultaneously calling for the deplatforming of legal sex workers, the censorship of nudity on Netflix, and the removal of LGBTQ content from Amazon.

Their campaign against Pornhub is insincere and untruthful, and if MPs are swayed by #Traffickinghub's call to shut down the site, not only will it not solve the problem — pushing viewers to less regulated and less responsible platforms overseas — it will devastate the workers who depend on responsible, legal adult platforms to pay rent, feed families, and build equity.

We call on the MPs to allow these workers to also speak, and to work with those of us who have fought on these frontlines, who understand the risks and challenges and the data — rather than groups whose goal is to ban sexual speech itself.

Michael Stabile  
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Free Speech Coalition

*Free Speech Coalition is the North American trade organization for the adult industry and its workers in the US and Canada.*