



CONCERNED
WOMEN for **AMERICA**
LEGISLATIVE ACTION COMMITTEE



EXODUS  **CRY**

 **AMERICAN**
PRINCIPLES PROJECT



February 14, 2020

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr:

On July 16, 2016, presidential candidate Donald J. Trump signed the Children's Internet Safety Presidential Pledge, committing his administration to "aggressively enforce" existing laws to prevent the exploitation of children online.¹ Federal obscenity laws were explicitly listed as a key component of the pledge. As you well know, obscenity, often referred to as hardcore pornography, is illegal: 18 U.S.C. Chapter 71 § 1460-1470, prohibits distribution of hardcore pornography on the Internet, on cable/satellite TV, on hotel/motel TV, in retail shops, and by common carrier.

In light of President Trump's pledge and the indisputable status of obscenity as a violation of federal law, the undersigned organizations are perplexed that under the Trump Administration, **not one adult obscenity prosecution** has been undertaken, much as none were initiated by the Obama Administration.

As a result of the federal government's apparent indifference, online pornography has only gotten more brutal. Regarding the gruesome perversity of online obscenity, here is just one example of thousands we could offer: During the week of January 4, Pornhub's most watched video, with over four million views worldwide, showed a teenage girl being electrocuted, burned with wax, and penetrated by a machine, while her hands and feet were shackled and her mouth was gagged. She screamed in pain, throughout this torture.²

¹ Enough is Enough, "The Children's Internet Safety Presidential Pledge," (July 16, 2016), enough.org/objects/EIE-prespledge-signedtrump.pdf (accessed February 4, 2020).

² Laila Mickelwait, "Pornhub's #4 Most Watched Video this Week," Twitter (January 11, 2020), twitter.com/LailaMickelwait/status/1215880627301449729 (accessed February 4, 2020).

Meanwhile, criminals exploiting human dignity have gotten more audacious. Last December, The Erotic Review, a notorious online forum where high-frequency buyers of prostitution and sex trafficking rate the people they bought, was back to business as usual. It shuttered its U.S. operations³ soon after passage of FOSTA-SESTA and the seizure by federal agents of Backpage.com.⁴

Our concern is not academic.

Mounting medical evidence finds extensive neurological and physical harm is caused by exposure to the lewd graphic obscenity openly available to anyone who can type a few words in a search bar—or scroll and click through Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok.⁵ Enclosed is an 85-page research summary: “The Public Health Harms of Pornography: How Pornography Fuels Child Sexual Abuse, Compulsive Sexual Behavior, Violence against Women, Commercial Sexual Exploitation, and More.” Most adversely impacted are developing minds: increased pornography use is linked to *decreased* grey matter and *reduced* functional connectivity in the brain.⁶

Further, 45 peer-reviewed studies demonstrate strong evidence that pornography leads to compulsive sexual behavior,⁷ which means, the more you view the more you want to see, despite negative consequences. The prevalence of pornography consumption has contributed to documented harms such as skyrocketing rates of Erectile Dysfunction among males aged 18-40 years.⁸ Disturbingly, a meta-analysis of 46 studies reported that the effects of exposure to pornographic material are “clear and consistent:” pornography use puts people at increased risk for committing sexual offenses.⁹ Further support for an association between pornography use and sexual offending is found in a national longitudinal study of sexual offenses (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual assault, coercive sex, and rape) among youth aged 10–21 years.¹⁰ The study found that the average age of first perpetration was between 15 and 16 years old, and importantly, after controlling for potentially influential characteristics, current exposure to violent pornography

³ Jon Brodtkin, “‘Erotic Review’ Blocks US Internet Users to Prepare for Government Crackdown,” *Ars Technica* (April 9, 2018), <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2018/04/erotic-review-blocks-us-internet-users-to-prepare-for-government-crackdown/>.

⁴ Tom Jackman, “Backpage CEO Carl Ferrer Pleads Guilty in Three States, Agrees to Testify against Other Website Officials,” *The Washington Post* (April 13, 2018), [washingtonpost.com/news/true-crime/wp/2018/04/13/backpage-ceo-carl-ferrer-pleads-guilty-in-three-states-agrees-to-testify-against-other-website-officials/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/true-crime/wp/2018/04/13/backpage-ceo-carl-ferrer-pleads-guilty-in-three-states-agrees-to-testify-against-other-website-officials/) (accessed February 4, 2020).

⁵ #FixAppRatings, “Evidence,” [fixappratings.com/evidence/](https://www.fixappratings.com/evidence/) (accessed February 4, 2020).

⁶ Simone Kühn and Jürgen Gallinat, “Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption,” *JAMA Psychiatry* 71, no. 7 (2014): 827-834; Ji-woo Seok and Jin-Hun Sohn, “Gray Matter Deficits and Altered Resting-State Connectivity in the Superior Temporal Gyrus among Individuals with Problematic Hypersexual Behavior,” *Brain Research* 1684, (2018): 30–39. doi:10.1016/j.brainres.2018.01.035.

⁷ Thomas G. Kimball, PhD., “This is Why Pornography is so Powerfully Addictive,” *The Doctor is In* (June 20, 2017), <https://thedoctorweighsin.com/why-is-pornography-so-powerfully-addictive/>

⁸ Ivan Landripet and Aleksandar Stulhofer, “Is Pornography Use Associated with Sexual Difficulties and Dysfunction among Younger Heterosexual Men?” *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 12 (2015): 1136-1139.

⁹ Elizabeth Paolucci-Oddone, Mark Genuis, and Claudio Violato, “A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Pornography.” *The Changing Family and Child Development*, ed. Claudio Violato, Elizabeth Paolucci-Oddone, and Mark Genuis (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 48-59.

¹⁰ Michelle L. Ybarra and Richard E. Thompson, “Predicting the Emergence of Sexual Violence in Adolescence,” *Prevention Science* 19, no. 4 (2018): 403–415, doi. 10.1007/s11121-017-0810-4. Note: this finding was not significant for attempted rape only.

was strongly associated with the emergence of sexual violence perpetration. Content analysis studies demonstrate pornography teaches users that women enjoy sexual violence and degradation.¹¹

Torture, incest, group sex, bestiality, choking, and excretion are among the acts common in obscenity today. Hardcore pornography is combined with explicitly racist and misogynic themes as well as a near-infinite variety of teen rape story lines. This toxic brew is poisoning the minds of users, young and old, but it is having a particularly insidious impact on young viewers, who have no real-world references—or an experience of authentic intimacy—to frame the violence and perversity they often stumble on, inadvertently.

We write to request a meeting with you to discuss the many dimensions of this problem, and our multiple reasons for seeking federal intervention to limit obscenity. Among us are attorneys who have prosecuted obscenity cases in the past; we are not naïve about the legal requirements and hurdles in place to successfully prosecute this filth. However, we believe the gravity of this issue and harm it is inflicting on society make it well worth the effort.

Sincerely,

Tim Wildmon, President
American Family Association

Terry Schilling, Executive Director
American Principles Project

Penny Young Nance, President and CEO
Concerned Women for America

Donna Rice Hughes, President and CEO
Enough Is Enough

Benjamin Nolot, Founder and President
Exodus Cry

Tony Perkins, President
Family Research Council

Patrick A. Trueman, President and CEO
National Center on Sexual Exploitation

¹¹ Ana Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Erica Scharrer, Chyng Sun, and Rachel Liberman, “Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best Selling Pornography: A Content Analysis update.” *Violence against Women* 16, no. 10 (2010): 1065-1085; Eran Shor, “Age, Aggression, and Pleasure in Popular Online Pornographic Videos,” *Violence against Women* (2018): 1–19, doi: 10.1177/1077801218804101