



Authored by Enough Is Enough®<sup>1</sup>

## **THE 2024 “CHILDREN’S INTERNET SAFETY PRESIDENTIAL PLEDGE”**

### **-PREAMBLE-**

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The internet is an unprecedented educational and communications tool making vast amounts of knowledge instantaneously accessible. Children and adolescents have fully integrated the internet into their daily lives, using technology and digital devices as a primary platform for education, communication, social interaction, entertainment, exploration, and self-expression. While it allows users access to what is good, beneficial, and enriching, when unrestricted, it also opens floodgates to what is dangerous, obscene, violent, and criminal.<sup>2</sup>

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the impact of this broad spectrum of content and activity. This explosion in the use of such devices, evolving social media, app and gaming platforms, evolving technologies such as artificial intelligence and the expansion of unrestricted public Wi-Fi has left parents, caregivers and law enforcement officials, ill-equipped and often overwhelmed as to how to best protect children and families from new and emerging online threats and hold offenders accountable.

Safeguarding the innocence and dignity of children in the digital world is an issue that currently has bipartisan support at the federal and state levels of government. Preventing the sexual exploitation of youth online and other internet-enabled risks requires a multifaceted comprehensive and coordinated response involving a shared commitment by the public, corporations, and government. A growing number of government commissions<sup>3</sup>, task forces<sup>4</sup>, scholars, institutions<sup>5</sup> and the World Congress on Child Dignity<sup>6</sup> have recognized the significant risks associated with unfettered internet access by youth, and they have called upon governments, policymakers, parents/caregivers, industry, and educators to take action.<sup>7</sup> (See “Research” section).

## -THE RECITALS-

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**Whereas**, the United States Supreme Court has ruled there are categories of sexual content that are not entitled to full First Amendment protection and which can be restricted or proscribed altogether, including obscenity and child pornography (child sex abuse material or CSAM) and reaffirmed in a 1998 decision noting both laws are still in effect for physical and electronic transfers: “[t]ransmitting obscenity and child pornography, whether via the internet or other means, is already illegal under federal law for both adults and juveniles.”<sup>8</sup>

**Whereas**, there are existing federal laws criminalizing online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC), predation and sex trafficking of children. The need for aggressive enforcement of current federal laws and adequate funding for law enforcement to do so has been emphasized for over two decades.

**Whereas**, in 2023, The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) CyberTipline received 36.2 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation online containing more than 105 million images, videos, and other files. Online enticement increased more than 300% from 2021 to 2023.<sup>9</sup>The United States harbors a staggering 30% of global child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online.<sup>10</sup>

**Whereas**, human trafficking, a form of modern slavery which exists throughout the United States and around the world, “tears apart communities, fuels criminal activity, and threatens the national security of the United States. It is estimated that millions of individuals are trafficked around the world each year—including into and within the United States”.<sup>11</sup>

**Whereas**, the United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released *Surgeon General’s Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health*<sup>12</sup> indicating social media can pose a risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents, stating that this is the “defining public health challenge of our times.” Ninety-five percent of 13-17 year olds use social media platforms, with more than a third saying they use social media “almost constantly.”<sup>13</sup> “Children are exposed to harmful content on social media, ranging from violent and sexual content, to bullying and harassment. .... We are in the middle of a national youth mental health crisis, and I am concerned that social media is an important driver of that crisis – one that we must urgently address.”<sup>14</sup>When a former surgeon general warned that smoking could cause physical health problems, it ushered in momentous change resulting in the tobacco industry being required to fund a massive education campaign.<sup>15</sup>

**Whereas**, the average age of first exposure to prosecutable pornography is age 12. More than half (ages 13-17) said they viewed violent pornography (rape, choking, someone in pain).<sup>16</sup> Congress included report language in the 2022 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill supporting “the work of the DOJ in investigating and prosecuting major producers and distributors of hardcore adult pornography”... “Such enforcement is necessary to protect the welfare of families and children as traffickers in illegal adult obscenity seek to extend their influence through advances in technology”...and to “increase its efforts in enforcing Federal obscenity laws.”<sup>17</sup> Seventeen states have either passed or adopted public health crisis resolutions, recognizing pornography’s harmful effects on children, individuals and society.<sup>18</sup>

**Whereas**, a Department of Justice 2020 review of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act stated: “The combination of significant technological changes since 1996 and the expansive interpretation that courts have given Section 230; however, has left online platforms both immune for a wide array of illicit activity on their services and free to moderate content with little transparency or accountability.”<sup>19</sup> It concluded “the time is ripe to realign the scope of Section 230 with the realities of the modern Internet.”

**Whereas**, cyberbullying has become rampant and pervasive among minors and is linked to negative impacts on mental health, substance use, and suicide. Bullied children are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, changes in sleep and eating patterns, health complaints, decreased academic achievement, and are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.<sup>20</sup> Forty-six percent of teens between 13-17 report experiencing some form of cyberbullying.<sup>21</sup>

**Whereas**, financial sextortion is one of fastest growing crimes targeting children. The FBI and international law enforcement partners issued a joint warning about a global financial sextortion crisis having seen an explosion in incidents of minor boys around the world being coerced into sending explicit images online and extorted for money.<sup>22</sup> A report issued by NCMEC and nonprofit Thorn found that sextortion incidents have significantly climbed in recent years with reports of online enticement increasing by 82% from 2021 to 2022.<sup>23</sup>

**Whereas**, Attorneys General in all 54 U.S. states and territories called for a commission to study the impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on child exploitation, expressing deep concern over potential misuse of AI to exploit and harm children through location tracking, voice mimicking, deepfake images, and AI-generated CSAM.<sup>24</sup>

**Whereas**, other nations have established a top-ranking government officer to address the prevention of the online exploitation of children<sup>25</sup> and U.S. children and families would benefit from having such an office, as similar positions currently exist such as the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.<sup>26</sup>

*Now, therefore*, we assert that the 47th President of the United States has both the challenge and opportunity through the presidential appointment process, presidential directives and policies, a robust legislative agenda, and the implementation of *The Children's Internet Safety Pledge* to make the internet safer and more secure for children and families. An entire generation will be lost if online threats to children are not mitigated now. In this respect, Enough Is Enough and our NGO allies representing millions of Americans, call upon the 2024 presidential candidates to adopt *The Children's Internet Safety Presidential Pledge* to defend the innocence and dignity of America's children in the digital world.

## -PLEDGE-

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### **If elected President of the United States of America, I promise to:**

1) Uphold the rule of law by ensuring aggressive enforcement of existing federal laws and advancing sound public policies to prevent the online exploitation and abuse of children, in a manner that is consistent with the government's compelling interest in protecting its most vulnerable citizens, within the limits set forth by the First Amendment,<sup>27</sup> by:

- a. Appointing an Attorney General who will make the prosecution of obscenity, child pornography (CSAM), sexual predation, and sex trafficking laws a top priority in my Administration.
- b. Ensuring the intelligence and law enforcement communities are provided with the necessary resources and tools necessary to investigate and prosecute the internet-enabled exploitation and abuse of children; and
- c. Detering and addressing child exploitation by expanding existing restrictions on CSAM to explicitly cover AI-generated CSAM.

2) Direct the Surgeon General and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to undertake investigations and appropriate responsive actions to address the public health risks of the online exploitation and abuse of minor children via social media, online gaming, excessive screen time, exposure to sexually explicit content and other risks, and to launch a comprehensive public awareness campaign.

- 3) Consider the creation of a multi-sector bipartisan Presidential Commission to examine the links and resulting cycle of abuse stemming between obscene pornography, CSAM, online exploitation, predation, and human trafficking in order to make subsequent recommendations to the Administration and to Congress.
  
- 4) Encourage public-private partnerships with technology companies to voluntarily reduce the threat of the internet-enabled exploitation of children and advance bipartisan legislation requiring internet technology services and platforms to improve safety measures, policies, and tools including age verification technologies, improved best practices, safer by design implementation, user-friendly reporting mechanisms, parental control tools, and public awareness and education initiatives.
  
- 5) Consider creating a White House position of Children’s Internet Safety Director (or Senior Advisor to the President on Internet Safety) to oversee and direct the President's domestic policy on children’s internet safety issues.
  
- 6) Support bipartisan Congressional efforts to amend Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 to allow prosecution of those who facilitate illegal commercial sex acts via the internet in order to thwart the practice of sex trafficking and the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and prevent those engaged in it from profiting from the exploitation of countless children.<sup>28</sup>

**Signed,**

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Name

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Date

## **-SUPPORTING RESEARCH-**

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[See research here.](#)

## **-ENDNOTES-**

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<sup>1</sup>Enough Is Enough®, a national non-partisan, non-profit organization who has led the fight to make the internet safer for children and families since 1994, issued the first ever “Children’s Internet Presidential Pledge” during the 2016 presidential election cycle. Donald J. Trump signed the Pledge and Secretary Hillary Clinton supported the Pledge via an endorsement letter.

<sup>2</sup>Hughes, Donna Rice. Christian-apologetics-Journal-spring2014.pdf. Accessed September 19, 2024.  
<https://enough.org/objects/christian-apologetics-journal-spring2014.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>“Report to Congress,” *Commission on Child Online Protection (COPA)*. (2000): 10, 43-44.  
[http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/COPAreport\\_0.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/COPAreport_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Angela Hawke and Alison Raphael, “The Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism,” Thailand: ECPAT International, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Victor C. Strasburger, Amy B. Jordan, and Ed Donnerstein, “Health Effects of Media on Children and Adolescents,” *American Academy of Pediatrics* 125, no. 4 (2010)

<sup>6</sup>Child Dignity Alliance. "2017 Congress — Child Dignity in the Digital World." Accessed September 16, 2024.  
<https://www.childdignity.com/2017-congress-1>.

<sup>7</sup> Jill C. Manning. “The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family: A Review of the Research,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention* 13, no. 2-3 (2006): 131-165.; Eric W. Owens, et al. “The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention* 19, no. 1072-0162 (2012): 19, 99-112.

<sup>8</sup>Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union, 521 U.S. 844 (1997).

<sup>9</sup>National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. "Congress Holds 'Big Tech' Accountable in Monumental Child Safety Hearing." National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (blog), January 30, 2024.

<sup>10</sup>Williams, Rhiannon. "The US Now Hosts More Child Sexual Abuse Material Online than Any Other Country." Internet Watch Foundation, April 26, 2022.  
<https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/iwf-in-the-news/the-us-now-hosts-more-child-sexual-abuse-material-online-than-any-other-country/>.

<sup>11</sup>“The Federal Register.” Federal Register, Feb. 5, 2020. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/02/05/2020-02438/combating-human-trafficking-and-online-child-exploitation-in-the-united-states>.

<sup>12</sup>Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH). “Surgeon General Issues New Advisory about Effects Social Media Use Has on Youth Mental Health.” HHS.gov, May 23, 2023. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/23/surgeon-general-issues-new-advisory-about-effects-social-media-use-has-youth-mental-health.html>.

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<sup>13</sup>Vogels, Emily A. “Teens and Cyberbullying 2022.” Pew Research Center, December 15, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/12/15/teens-and-cyberbullying-2022/>.

<sup>14</sup> Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH). “Surgeon General Issues New Advisory about Effects Social Media Use Has on Youth Mental Health.” HHS.gov, May 23, 2023. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/23/surgeon-general-issues-new-advisory-about-effects-social-media-use-has-youth-mental-health.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, Donna Rice. “Treat Big Tech like Big Tobacco to Protect Our Kids.” Fox News, June 15, 2023. <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/treat-tech-like-tobacco-protect-kids>.

<sup>16</sup>Robb, Michael B., and Supreet Mann. “Teens and Pornography.” Common Sense Media, 2023. <https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2022-teens-and-pornography-final-web.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup>H. Rept. 117-97 - Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2022 117th Congress (2021-2022).” Congress.gov. Accessed September 16, 2024. <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/117th-congress/house-report/97/1?outputFormat=pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> “Pornography: Public Health Crisis.” National Decency Coalition. Accessed September 16, 2024. <https://decencyusa.org/pornography-public-health-crisis/>.

<sup>19</sup> “Department of Justice’s Review of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996.” Archives U.S. Department of Justice, May 8, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/archives/ag/departments-justice-s-review-section-230-communications-decency-act-1996#:~:text=The%20combination%20of%20significant%20technological%20changes%20since%201996,to%20moderate%20content%20with%20little%20transparency%20or%20accountability>.

<sup>20</sup> “Effects of Bullying.” StopBullying.gov, May 21, 2021. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/effects>.

<sup>21</sup>Vogels, Emily A. “Teens and Cyberbullying 2022.” Pew Research Center, December 15, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/12/15/teens-and-cyberbullying-2022/>.

<sup>22</sup> “FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes.” FBI, December 19, 2022. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/press-releases/fbi-and-partners-issue-national-public-safety-alert-on-financial-sextortion-schemes>.

<sup>23</sup> “Trends in Financial Sextortion: An Investigation of Sextortion Reports in NCMEC CyberTipline Data.” Thorn, June 24, 2024. <https://www.thorn.org/research/library/financial-sextortion/>.

<sup>24</sup>Kinnard, Meg. “Prosecutors in All 50 States Urge Congress to Strengthen Tools to Fight AI Child Sexual Abuse Images.” AP News, September 5, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/ai-child-pornography-attorneys-general-bc7f9384d469b061d603d6ba9748f38a>.

<sup>25</sup>“eSafety Commissioner.” Australian Government. Accessed September 17, 2024. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of State. Accessed September 17, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-civilian-security-democracy-and-human-rights/office-to-monitor-and-combat-trafficking-in-persons/>.

<sup>27</sup>“It is evident beyond the need for elaboration that a State’s interest in ‘safeguarding the physical and psychological well-being of a minor’ is ‘compelling.’” (New York v. Ferber, 458 U.S. 747, 756-57 (1982))

<sup>28</sup>Elizabeth, Heichler “U.S. states' attorneys general to take aim at Internet 'safe harbor' law,” *IDG News Service*, Last modified June 18, 2013. Accessed July 11, 2016. <http://www.pcworld.com/article/2042351/us-states-attorneys-general-to-take-aim-at-internet-safe-harbor-law.html>.