



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Representative Rob Swearingen, Chair
Members, Assembly Committee on State Affairs

FROM: David Earleywine, Associate Director

DATE: March 12, 2025

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 105, Age Verification for Pornography

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Assembly Bill 105.

This bill prohibits business entities from knowingly and intentionally publishing or distributing material harmful to minors on the internet without performing a reasonable age verification method to verify the age of individuals attempting to access the website. By July 1, 2025, there will be 20 states with age verification laws and another 17 will have introduced similar legislation.¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that pornography “does grave injury to the dignity of the participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials” (CCC 2354). In other words, pornography is contrary to human dignity which causes those who view it to treat people like “objects” for personal gratification.

The average age of first exposure to pornography is 11.² That means elementary school age children are being exposed to pornography. This can be traumatizing for youth. As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes “Seeing it steals their innocence and gives them a distorted image of sexuality, relationships, and men and women, which may then affect their behavior. It can also make them more vulnerable to being sexually abused, since their understanding of appropriate behavior can be damaged.”³

In the last 20 years, pornography has grown increasingly affordable, accessible, and anonymous. The rise of high-speed internet made it accessible online with a few clicks. The rise of the smartphone allowed everyone to carry around porn at their fingertips at all times.

Consider these statistics regarding the rise of smartphones and pornography for children:

1. In 2022, 95% of teens owned smartphones. This included 53% of 11-year-olds.⁴
2. In 2021, 42% of children had a smartphone by age 10 (in 2009 only 9% had a cell phone of any kind at age 10).⁵
3. By October 2023, approximately 97% of traffic to Pornhub.com came from a mobile device.⁶
4. In 2019, the world’s top porn site had more than 1 BILLION visitors per month.⁷ This was more visitors than Amazon, Twitter, and Netflix combined.
5. As of 2022, 73% of teens reported they had consumed pornography.⁸
6. In the same study, 15% of teens reported consuming pornography by age 10.

In short, these statistics show an alarming trend of pornography consumption by teens and children. Even the World Health Organization recognized this epidemic in 2022, when it included "compulsive sexual behavior"—which includes habitual pornography—to its list of impulse control disorders.

These statistics are alarming, but only tell part of the story. Viewing pornography is linked to both short-term and long-term negative outcomes. “In a literature review of four case studies and nine articles from 2000 to 2022 ... in all facets of the users lives negative consequences were seen.”⁹

In the short term, individuals using pornography often experience loneliness, shame, withdrawal from social events, and other negative effects. Long term, porn consumption is linked to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes.¹⁰

As one study states, children are the most vulnerable due to the “malleable nature of their brains” and adolescence is when “most mental health conditions and addictions develop.” Furthermore, the “academic literature makes it clear that pornography use has significant impacts on adolescent development.”¹¹

Specifically, “pornography consumption by youth has been linked to the exacerbation of paraphilias, an increase in sexual aggression perpetration and victimization and ... an increase in online sexual victimization.”¹²

A 2023 study found that: exposure to pornography promoted “teen dating violence,” “victimization of females in sexually abusive relationships,” and “behavioral changes in adolescents ... including the adoption of unsafe sexual practices.” The study also found that “rapes, violent crimes, and sexual assaults” were higher in adolescents who spent greater time viewing pornography. Lastly, the study reported pornography could lead to “teen pregnancies as a result of unsafe sexual practices emulating the online content.”¹³

Those that emphasize the free speech rights of the pornography industry will emphasize that parents can protect their children by installing filters on their devices. Such an argument does not acknowledge that the industry has adapted to these filtering devices. Simply put, individual parents cannot compete against a sophisticated industry that uses every trick to lure in viewers. What makes online pornography so different today than in the past is that viewers don’t have to go looking for it. No matter what filters parents may put on their devices, the porn industry finds ways to ensnare children. In essence, without meaningful restrictions, children are carrying poison in their phones.

Related to this is the fact that most parents do not have the ability to properly monitor their children’s use of the internet. Most parents work, in addition to raising their families, and have limited time and knowledge to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of social platforms.

Society does not just leave it up to parents to keep their children out of strip clubs. It also obliges strip clubs to refuse admission to minors. It follows then that platforms must block minors from virtual spaces that peddle pornography. This is not a violation of free speech. Adults can still produce and consume porn. But now that porn addiction has been definitively shown to damage children, governments have a responsibility to prohibit the porn industry from targeting children. After all, we don’t allow the tobacco or alcohol industries to target children. Minors must present an ID when attempting to purchase tobacco and alcohol. The same should be required when they attempt to access online porn.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge you to support this legislation. Thank you.

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- ¹ Free Speech Coalition, *Age Verification Bill Tracker* (2025), <https://action.freespeechcoalition.com/age-verification-bills/>.
- ² Amanda Giordano et al., *Pornography Use and Sexting Trends Among American Adolescents: Data to Inform School Counseling Programming and Practice*, (Oct. 31, 2022), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2156759X221137287>.
- ³ USCCB, *Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography*, (2015), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Create-in-Me-a-Clean-Heart-Statement-on-Pornography.pdf>
- ⁴ *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton: Brief of Amici Curiae from Major Religious Organizations Supporting Respondent and Affirmance*, p. 23 (Nov. 2024), https://www.usccb.org/resources/FSCvPaxton_FINAL.pdf.
- ⁵ *Id.* at 24.
- ⁶ *Id.* at 26.
- ⁷ Hasseeb Qadri et al., *Physiological, Psychosocial and Substance Abuse Effects of Pornography Addiction: A Narrative Review*, (Jan. 12, 2023), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9922938/>.
- ⁸ *Id.*
- ⁹ *Id.*
- ¹⁰ UNICEF, *Protection of children from the harmful impacts of pornography*, <https://www.unicef.org/harmful-content-online>.
- ¹¹ Mary Sharpe and Darryl Mead, *Problematic Pornography Use: Legal and Health Policy Considerations*, (Sept. 9, 2021), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8426110/>.
- ¹² *Id.*
- ¹³ Surobhi Chatterjee and Sujitia Kumar Kar, *Teen Pornography: An Emerging Mental Health Challenge*, (Mar. 9 2023), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/26318318231154230>.