

October 27, 2017

Dr. Patrick C. Kinlaw, Superintendent
Henrico County Public Schools
P.O. Box 23120
3820 Nine Mile Road
Henrico, Virginia 23223

Mr. Thomas McAuley
Short Pump Middle School
4701 Pouncey Tract Road
Glen Allen, Va. 23059

RE: Incident Involving Middle School Boys Simulating Coercive Sex Acts/Racial Slurs

Dear Messrs. Kinlaw and McAuley:

As advocates and experts in the field of sexual assault and exploitation prevention, and/or members of the Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation (CESE) Prevention Task Force, we share your community's alarm about the behavior of the certain students which recently occurred in the locker room at Short Pump Middle School.

We work on the front lines to prevent problems arising from the impact of hyper-sexualized media and pornified culture on our nation's children. Everywhere we go we hear about increasing incidents of developmentally inappropriate and damaging sexual behavior in children. For this reason, we feel that it is critically important to connect the dots between acts of sexual aggression exhibited by young people and their likely exposure to pornography.

In this case, the sexualized behaviors exhibited by the boys are especially alarming in light of the coercive and forceful way in which they were carried out. This incident was not an expression of mere sexual curiosity, but displayed the hallmarks of learned predatory behaviors—behaviors that pornography teaches all too well. Today's mainstream pornography is not only free and easily accessible by children, but is drenched with themes of coercion, degradation, and violence. For all too many of our nation's children, brutal and hate-filled pornography is serving as their de facto sexual education.

We are also disturbed by the racism involved in this incident. It is urgently important to recognize that racism is a common theme in pornography that may exacerbate preexisting racist attitudes. We strongly believe the incident at Short Pump Middle School can only be correctly understood and addressed when the easy accessibility of violent, racist pornography to young children is recognized.

In addition, it is important to recognize that male sexual abuse is just as abhorrent as the sexual abuse of girls and women. Sexual victimization is unacceptable regardless of gender. We encourage the community to perceive this as a serious incident without dismissing it as case of "boys being boys." Child sexual abuse estimates show that from 3-17% of boys will experience sexual abuse.¹ Accordingly, we

¹ J. Barth, L. Bermetz, E. Heim, S. Trelle, and T. Tonia, "The Current Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse Worldwide: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *International Journal of Public Health* 58, no. 3 (2013): 469–83, doi: 10.1007/s00038-012-0426-1. The analysis included only studies in which the participants were below 18 years old and in which the country was known.

encourage the school and community to provide qualified, trauma-informed services to help these young victims get the support they need in a timely manner.

While some people may see this situation as a rare threat, when one considers reports from around the world, it is apparent incidents such as the one within your school system are part of an alarming trend that is affecting children and families everywhere.

- A 2015 survey of 700 12- to 13-year-olds conducted in the UK found that nearly 1 in 10 worry they are addicted to pornography. Additionally, one in five of those surveyed said they had seen pornographic images that had shocked or upset them, and 12 per cent admitted to making or been part of a sexually explicit video.²
- Early sexualization through exposure to pornography is leading to increasing levels of child-on-child sexual abuse and “turning children into copycat sexual predators.”³
- “Pornography exposure is a significant risk factor for sexual violence perpetration by children and young people. There is no doubt: pornography exposure increases the risk of children’s and young people’s perpetration of sexual assault.”⁴
- “A recent UK survey of 994 adolescents (52% male; 47% female; 1% identified as other) found that 56% of boys and 40% of girls had been exposed to Internet pornography. Of those who had seen pornography 53% of boys agreed that pornography is realistic compared to 39% of girls. Additionally, 44% of males aged 11–16 who viewed pornography reported that *online pornography gave them ideas about the type of sex they wanted to try* [emphasis added]. Researchers also observed a desensitizing effect, noting that rates of curiosity, shock, and confusion dropped with repeated viewing.”⁵
- “Child-against-child sexual abuse is more common in Missouri than experts had previously believed . . . Senate Bill 341 went into effect requiring all complaints of children with problem sexual behaviors to be assessed by the state. Before the new law, there was no statewide procedure for handling the problem . . . While experts had believed the number of cases this

² NSPCC, “Shocking Figures Show One in Ten 12-13 Year Olds are Worried They are Addicted to Porn. ChildLine Campaign Launches to Help Build Children’s Resilience to Porn,” (March 31, 2015).

³ Freda Briggs, “Harm Being Done to Australian Children through Access to Pornography on the Internet,” Australian Senate Inquiry, (2015), <http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=b4af06e7-9a05-47fb-a58d-96af43bc181e&subId=413047>.

⁴ Michael Flood, “Inquiry into the Harm Being Done to Australian Children through Access to Pornography on the Internet,” *Australian Human Rights Commission*, (2016), <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/submissions/inquiry-harm-being-done-australian-children-through-access-pornography-internet>.

⁵ Elena Martellozzo et al., “I Wasn’t Sure It Was Normal To Watch It . . .’ A Quantitative and Qualitative Examination of the Impact of Online Pornography on the Values, Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviours of Children and Young People,” London, UK: Middlesex University (2016), https://www.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf.file/0021/223266/MDX-NSPCC-OCC-pornography-report.pdf.

would affect each year was about 600, the first five months under the new law brought almost 2,000.”⁶

- “Educators, child welfare groups, childcare workers, mental health bodies, medicos and parents are reeling. All are struggling to deal with the proliferation of hyper-sexualised imagery and its impacts on the most vulnerable – children whose sexuality is still under construction, children for whom pornography becomes a template for sexual activity, a ‘how to’ manual for future use.”⁷

The adolescent boys who were the abusers in this case have been clearly influenced and harmed by hyper-sexualized media and are in need of counseling and any other services available to help them. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that children who view pornography are at risk of damage to their mental health at a critical time in their development (see *Pornography and Public Health: Research Summary* attached).

Our hope is that this situation will serve as a wake-up call to the community and other communities across the nation that more needs to be done to help youth understand that pornography is a disordered and damaging view of sexuality. Parents, educators, churches, and other community institutions can help reverse this threatening trend by taking immediate action to teach children and teens how to safely navigate the dangerous and destructive impact of pornography.

Our organizations are committed to preventing sexual abuse and exploitation. We welcome the opportunity to consult with you and stand at the ready to assist as you seek to develop an appropriate response to this tragic event. We can be contacted through Ms. Lisa Thompson at the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, at 202-393-7245 or at lisa@ncose.com.

For a world free from sexual exploitation

Sincerely,



Vauna Davis, Chair
Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation, Prevention Task Force
and Reach 10
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Beau Abdulla, Voice for Choice
www.voiceforchoice.org

Shane Adamson, Certified Sexual Health-Addiction Therapist and Couples Expert

Dina Alexander, MS, Educate and Empower Kids
<http://educateempowerkids.org/>

⁶ Claudine Gallacher, “Sexual Behavior in Children: Warning Signs and Alarming Trends.” *Protect Young Minds*, (2017), <https://protectyoungminds.org/2017/04/27/problem-sexual-behavior-children>.

⁷ Melinda Reist, “Why Are 5-Year-Olds Creating Porn Themed Images at School?” Melinda Tankard Reist website, (2016), <http://melindatankardreist.com/2016/07/when-5-year-olds-creat-porn-themed-images-in-class>.

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