The National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) is the leading national organization exposing the links between all forms of sexual exploitation such as child sexual abuse, prostitution, sex trafficking and the public health crisis of pornography. I thank the Committee for allowing my testimony today on a national crisis affecting our nation’s youth, a crisis that can be averted if Congress has the will to do so, as I believe it does.

Last December, my staff and I met a group of child survivors of sex trafficking, the oldest of whom was just 15. They knew about our national efforts to change policies that facilitate sexual exploitation at major corporations and said they had something they wanted us to understand.

These young girls shared their heartbreaking stories with us, all of which included the common thread of Snapchat and Instagram used by their sex traffickers to target, groom, and then to sell them to others for sex over and over again.

These girls also showed us message after message from random men—strangers—that they were receiving with flirtatious messages, pictures of genitals, and some even blatantly asking for sex acts in exchange for money. The girls were getting these direct messages even though some of their profiles were set to private.

Upon hearing their accounts, we reached out to other survivors and to survivor-serving organizations to see if this was a trend. Dozens of organizations from around the country have shared with us that the sex trafficked boys and girls they serve are having the same experiences.1

---

1 The following organizations serving domestic minors of sex trafficking want it included in this public record that youth they serve were targeted, groomed and sold on the Instagram platform:
Awaken, Reno, NV
Lavished Ministries, Inc., Panama City, FL
Courtney’s House, Washington, DC
FREE International, Las Vegas, NV
Donna Quinn, Ocala Police Department, Ocala, FL
Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice, Bonita Springs, FL
One More Child, Fort Myers, FL
Breaking Free, Inc., MN
Path2Freedom, Inc, Naples, FL
LOTUS Legal Clinic, Brookfield, WI
Hope for Freedom, Palm Beach Gardens, FL
Fresh Start Learning, Inc., Milwaukee, WI
Place of Hope, Palm Beach Gardens, FL
I then started reaching out to youth-serving groups to see if other young people were getting such attention from strangers. Many shared with me that they were. Random strangers, mostly adult men, are sending unsolicited sexualized private direct messages to teenage boys and girls. Some of the teens interviewed by me in these groups told me, “There is just nowhere we can go without being bombarded by this kind of stuff.”

Research by our team shows that it is a common experience of young users of platforms like Facebook’s Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Twitter to be exposed to predatory targeting, grooming, sexual violence, sex trafficking and prostitution, hardcore pornography, and more. At the end of this testimony, I have provided examples of sexual grooming, abuse, and trafficking on popular social media and apps.

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation regularly reaches out and dialogues with technology companies about improving policies and user experiences to create safer digital spaces for users. While many of these discussions yielded incremental improvements, small steps platform by platform are only minimally helping to curb sexual exploitation, while untold large numbers of kids find their way into the complex web of sexual exploitation each day.

The power to protect millions of young people in America rests with Congress. Congressional leadership is urgently needed to hold technology companies accountable for developing solutions to these complex problems created by their platforms. Solutions like an independent app ratings board, default settings based on age of the user, or updating the Children’s Online Protect Act or the Children’s Internet Protection Act, or a Congressional study on these issues would significantly help in creating a safer online world for kids in America.

Examples of Sexual Grooming, Abuse, and Trafficking on Popular Social Media and Apps

The below screenshots are taken from Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. There are several more apps and social media platforms that contribute to sexual harm and trauma, and NCOSE welcomes a dialogue about additional apps in addition to solutions for these issues.

**Instagram**

**Current Privacy Settings**

It takes 4 clicks to turn on privacy settings, which are not intuitive.

Even with an account turned to private, strangers are able to see any comments you make on someone else’s posts and they can send private direct messages to you. There is no way to disable this.
Examples of Coercion in Posting Pornographic Videos or Ads for Sex Acts on Instagram

Several 15-year-old girls who survived sex trafficking told NCOSE that girls were often forced to perform sex acts, or nude dances, on Instagram Live in a manner that made it look as if they were consenting during the act, although their trafficker stood in the corner the whole time.

Another young girl shared her story online about how being direct messaged by a pimp on Instagram as a minor eventually led to her being sold for sex on the streets.
https://youtu.be/itqJr3Osaw

Another anonymous girl shared with NCOSE that she was solicited on Instagram to send nude images, and after she did, that person used it to blackmail her into sex trafficking.

A California man has been charged with sex trafficking after forcing a San Jose woman he met on Instagram into a life of prostitution all over the western United States, authorities say.

A Texas pimp/trafficker created a dedicated Instagram page for selling 15-20 women for sex. “Get a glimpse of the life of these Macknificent ladies!” he wrote. He also created a Facebook page for the women with a “book now” option. Police referred to the women in his Instagram posts as being “controlled” by him. According to Felicia Grantham, human trafficking coordinator for the Fort Worth Police Department, there have been “53 at least semi-identified victims.”

A Nashville man was been sentenced to 15 years in federal prison in a sex trafficking case involving a 13-year-old girl. He met Instagram in 2016 and recruited her on that platform.

Examples of Grooming/Soliciting Direct Messages

A child advocate ally created a 15-year-old girl account, which liked a few celebrities and “cute boys” accounts. Within two hours she got a message from a man soliciting for nude pictures and send her some.

A young college student sent NCOSE the below screenshot of people targeting her sorority friends attempting to groom them for commercial sexual exploitation in a “sugar baby” relationship.
Examples of Child Sexual Abuse:

This direct message (DM) was received by our PYE test account while writing this blog post.

Along with 8 messages from other individuals. We didn't know any of them.

This particular one proceeded to send us a video of someone giving him oral sex as a way to convince us to send a picture of our nipple.
iloveyou.722019: Looking for a 14 year old Mexican boy to Skype me if you fit what I'm looking for DM me must send pic of 🌹 with face to prove age if not don't bother me
52m Reply

udjijckkckskakoaao: Add my snap tradepicsnvids1 boys if you have a little sister you fuck around with I'll trade vids for vids
16m Reply

abbyjones_2007: Send me young girl drop box links for a spam of me 😊😊
22m 1 like Reply

oxbyzy: Dm me to trade Dropbox links I got girls of all ages
7m Reply

mhmmhmhm69: Dm me to see my younger sisters panties
28s Reply

itz_ty_what: Send teen drop box links
19m Reply

krheart47: Dm me young boys
20m Reply

paulina.mueller97: Is there anyone who wants to exchange Dropbox links? 😊 prefer some underaged (I have them as well) 😊
12m Reply

wokew0: Send me pics and vids of girls for Dropbox links
7h Reply
Sex Dating Websites - literally tens of thousands of solicitations

megy_swann I just upload ad my videos and photo 🤩 click the link in my bio to see it
1w Reply

virginia_carolynne MY FULL VIDEOS XXX 🖤 Check my story, click link in my bio 😍大宗商品
2m Reply

misellia_carlote0 See My Masturbation Video
2m Reply

hanacourtney Watch my porn video in my link at my bio babe 🤩 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 😋 🚨 In-app browsers pop up leading you straight to nude photos and sex dating websites 🚨
Hardcore Pornographic Posts Seen By a 13-Year-Old and a 15-Year-Old Account. Note the common hashtags where hardcore pornography (depicting penetration with a focus on genitalia):
Snapchat
It is an accepted fact, supported by survivors of sex trafficking, that pornographic pictures and videos are used to advertise for both sex trafficking and prostitution victims (including minors.) Further, law enforcement is finding that many sex trafficking victims and child sexual abuse imagery (i.e. child pornography) victims, are coerced into creating livestream or webcam pornography as well.

Accounts posting and selling pornographic content, from images to videos to livestreams, and even requests for sugar baby/mommy dates, are undeniably flourishing on Snapchat.

It has been documented by law enforcement that pimps and sex traffickers often either coerce trafficking or child abuse victims into making such advertising posts, or the pimp and sex trafficker creates the posts themselves in their victim’s name. This is what was found to happen on Backpage.com—the notorious classifieds ads website that was recently shut down by the Department of Justice for knowingly facilitating sex trafficking ads.

As long as the Snapchat platform fails to proactively remove accounts posting pornography, and failing to remove ads for sex acts (whether recorded, live streamed, or in person) it is impossible to distinguish between those that are allegedly willingly distributing pornographic content and those whose pages are being managed by a sex trafficker or pimp.

Grooming, Sex Trafficking and Sexual Abuse

UMBC student arrested on campus on charges of soliciting minors on Snapchat
December, 2018

Police: Lincoln sex trafficking suspect met minor on Snapchat, told her to ‘auction’ herself
September, 2018

Story about child pornography ‘showing two children, aged 13, having sex’ being shared via Snapchat
https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/warning-parents-over-shocking-snapchat-11832122
January 10, 2018

Police officer allegedly used Snapchat to groom 15-year-old girl into sending sexually explicit images.
January, 2018

There Are Numerous Lists And Websites Across The Internet That Guide Snapchat Users To Find Accounts That Post Pornography.
Many have taken to Twitter and Instagram and post explicit and suggestive pictures and short videos explaining that if a follower adds them on Snapchat then they will send more sexually explicit material in exchange for money.
Snapchat Discover Content

While Snapchat made it possible Discover publishers to age-gate certain content, Snapchat has not required Discover publishers to be accountable for the messages they send underage audiences. This inappropriately puts the onus of responsibility on children.

As a result of lack of oversight or strict requirements, Discover publishers are shirking their responsibility to age-gate such content. Children as young as 13 years old are being exposed to Discover stories with sexualized content, explicit descriptions of sex acts, repeated hypersexualized images, and more, despite Snapchat’s aforementioned guidelines.

FOR EXAMPLE, A 13-YEAR-OLD USER IS EXPOSED TO CONTENT IN DISCOVER SUCH AS THE BELOW STORIES:
Twitter

Prostitution and Potential Sex Trafficking
*Note: many sex traffickers coerce their victims to maintain their social media accounts and post their own ads. Any website that hosts ads for prostitution is likely hosting ads for sex trafficking as well.
Child-, Rape-, And Incest-Themed Porn Via Twitter

There are rampant links to, accounts about, and videos of child-themed, incest-themed, and rape-themed (“forced sex”) pornography on Twitter. These are only a brief introduction to the kind of content being facilitated on Twitter’s platform: