

June 16, 2017

The Honourable Jane Philpott
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Philpott,

Over the last several years, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has worked extensively on issues of sexual exploitation, including prostitution and sex trafficking. In the course of this work, it has become clear that pornography is the root of many other forms of sexual exploitation.

It has also become evident to us, and to a wide range of stakeholders, that the widespread access to and use of pornography online contributes to a wide range of harms to children, individuals, and to society. Its impact on child social and sexual development, the way it is shaping sexual attitudes, behaviours and preferences, and its links to rape culture and commercial sexual exploitation constitute a public health crisis.

Parliament has not studied the issue of pornography since 1985, long before the internet made pornography available at the click of a button or swipe of a finger. We welcomed and supported Motion M-47, because we believe it is critical to consider and discuss the research and evidence on the harms of pornography.

We were very pleased when Motion M-47 received all party support in the House of Commons and we urged the Health Committee to conduct a comprehensive study of the issue.

Although the committee's study was brief, members heard powerful testimony on the impact of viewing easily accessible, violent and degrading sexual material. They heard it contributes to the rise in sexual harassment, assault and rape culture on school and college campuses across the country. It harms the social and sexual development of children. It contributes to sexual offences against children, by adults and by other children.

M-47 commissioned a study of the "public health effects" of the ease of access and viewing of violent and degrading sexual imagery online. It is deeply disappointing that the committee report disregards much of the testimony most relevant to the subject of the motion.

The committee chose not to hear directly from those who have been harmed or personally affected by pornography, or from those who deal with its effects on others. As well, the committee's motion to limit evidence in the final report to witnesses who have published peer-reviewed scientific research on this topic disregarded the testimony of those who have spent decades studying the effects of pornography on children, adults and culture.

As the committee heard, scientific research on pornography's effects – especially violent and degrading pornography – would be deemed unethical, particularly with respect to children, because it involves exposure to such violent and disturbing material.

The testimony of international experts on the public health effects of pornography, such as Dr. Gail Dines, Dr. Mary Anne Layden, Cordelia Anderson and Dr. Sharon Cooper, clearly stated that education is not enough to protect children from the harms of violent pornography online. They articulated that the responsibility for protecting children from its harms should not rest on parents alone, and that government action is required.

The weight of the evidence points to the need for government action to restrict access to this material by children and to develop a comprehensive public awareness and education strategy to address the harms of pornography.

Yet the report's limited recommendations focus primarily on education. So much more is needed to address the harms to the health of children, women and men, as clearly outlined by several of the witnesses and most of the written submissions, including a comprehensive government response.

We note that the UK recently passed strong age verification legislation and has been a leader in efforts to require blocking of pornographic content at the Internet Service Provider level. There is much we can learn from their experience.

As the government prepares a response to the committee's report, I ask that you consider the full testimony of the witnesses.

Further, in your portfolio as Health Minister, we urge you to consider the following measures:

1. **Mandate meaningful age verification** for all internet pornography, to help prevent children from being exposed to its harms.
2. **Develop a Public Health Awareness Campaign** to educate teachers, medical professionals, parents and individuals about the harms of pornography
3. **Require all Canadian Internet Service Providers to block pornographic content** at the service provider level, while allowing adults the option to opt-in to mature content.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further. Thank you for your consideration, and please be assured of our prayers for you.

Kind Regards,

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