

Statement of Ranking Member Mike Doyle
Hearing on “Latest Developments in Combating Online Sex Trafficking,”
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
November 30th, 2017
Rayburn 2123 – 2 pm

Thank you madam chairman for holding this important hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us today.

Human trafficking in all its forms - and in particular sexual trafficking of children and adults - is an abhorrent crime. I want to thank the witnesses here today from End Slavery Tennessee, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. This is hard work that you all do, and I know it carries a heavy burden. For my part, I want to thank you for your efforts and the efforts of your organizations. This is an issue of great concern to us all.

I'd also like to thank Representative Wagner for testifying before us today. I understand that this is an issue that you have been working on for some time - and that the SAVE Act that you wrote and which has become law is starting to be used to combat online sex trafficking.

I also understand that in reference to the bill before us today, you are working with Chairman Goodlatte on an Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to your bill and that you hope it will be marked up in Judiciary Committee. I am hopeful that you will be able to move your amended bill out of Committee and before the full House for a vote.

I also want to acknowledge the good work done by Senators McCaskill and Portman and the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in the investigation and the report they released on Backpage.com. The report is truly frightening. The report alleges that Backpage knowingly facilitated child sex trafficking.

I am deeply concerned about emails sent by Backpage moderators seeking to limit the number of ads they were reporting to NIC-MEC on a monthly basis and efforts by the company. In addition, according to the report Backpage repeatedly edited and altered ads by deleting words, phrases, and images that would indicate child sex trafficking without reporting those ads to NIC-MEC or other authorities. Again according to this report, these edits were done for the express purpose of concealing the illegal nature of these activities. Backpage went so far as to deploy software that automatically deleted terms from ads before publication, words such as amber alert, rape, young, and fresh. This filter was apparently deployed for the purpose of concealing the true nature of the transactions that were occurring on the site.

The report goes on to say that by Backpage's own internal estimates they were editing between 70-80% of ads in the Adult section of their site.

Backpage would go on to start rejecting ads that contained these words, but do so with a pop-up that would include explicit instructions for advertisers as to what the offending word or phrase was and how to repost their ad to get around Backpage's filters. Backpage used similar techniques when advertisers posted ads identifying people as under 18, simply instructing users to change the posted age in order for the ad to be posted.

To my mind this report indicates a vast criminal enterprise. I am heartened by reports that there are potentially multiple federal investigations using insights from the Senate report and an empaneled grand jury.

My hope is that justice can be done.

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