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Date: March 6, 2024

Oral PROPONENT testimony for SB 394 Requiring the use of age-verification technology to permit access to internet websites containing material that is harmful to minors.

To: Madam Chair Representative Susan Humphries and House Judiciary Committee members

From: Chuck Weber, Executive Director, Kansas Catholic Conference

Madam Chair Humphries and members of the committee,

My name is Chuck Weber and I serve as the executive director of the Kansas Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to speak as a PROPONENT to SB 394.

Defending the integrity of the family is a core value of the Catholic Church. Pornography attacks, wounds, and sometimes even destroys families and individuals. There are reams of empirical data demonstrating the very real dangers of pornography consumption, particularly when done by children.

While parents are the first and best defenders of their children, society also has an obligation to protect the family, what we often call the "domestic church." SB 394 will hold purveyors of porn accountable if the obscene materials they peddle and the harm they cause is seen and consumed by minors. We believe that SB 394 will help stem the flow of pornography to our young people.

This is not only the opinion of the Catholic Church. It is a position widely held across the cultural spectrum by other religious organizations and secular ones, including the Kansas Legislature.

On March 30, 2017, I was honored to carry and debate a resolution on the floor of the Kansas House of Representatives calling for the recognition of pornography as a public health hazard. The text of that resolution, which passed the House by a margin of 123-1, is included with my testimony. The Kansas Senate passed a resolution with identical language by a margin of 35-4.

I am proud to have been a part of the message sent by Kansas Legislators that day. The message they sent then is even more relevant and important today.

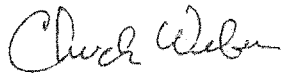
Please allow me to highlight one particular section from the Resolution that is relevant to our efforts here today:

“...we recognize the need for additional education, prevention, research and policy change at the community and societal levels, and we urge this chamber and other governing bodies to take appropriate steps to ensure progress is made.”

Good laws can be effective teachers of culture. SB 394 is very good legislation that will help prevent the pornography industry from capturing and addicting our youth to destructive behavior. It will also send a message about the harms of pornography—to everyone.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for allowing me to provide support for SB 394. Please feel free to reach out to me if I can be of assistance to you in this worthy endeavor to protect our families and children.

Thank you for your consideration.



Gerald C. “Chuck” Weber
Executive Director, Kansas Catholic Conference
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DEBATED AND PASSED ON THE HOUSE FLOOR, 123-1 ON MARCH 30, 2017

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 6016 A RESOLUTION recognizing that pornography is a public health hazard that leads to a broad spectrum of individual and public health impacts and societal harms.

WHEREAS, Pornography is creating a public health crisis and perpetuates a sexually toxic environment; and

WHEREAS, Efforts to prevent pornography exposure and addiction, to educate individuals and families concerning its harms and to develop recovery programs must be addressed systematically; and

WHEREAS, Due to advances in technology and the universal availability of the internet, young children are exposed to pornography at an alarming rate, with 27% of millennials, aged 25 to 30, reporting that they first viewed pornography before puberty, based on a 2016 Barna Group study; and

WHEREAS, This early exposure can lead to low self-esteem and body image disorders, an increase in problematic sexual activity at younger ages and an increased desire among adolescents to engage in risky sexual behavior; and

WHEREAS, Exposure to pornography often serves as a child's and a teen's sex education and shapes their sexual understanding, because pornography treats women and children as objects and commodities for the viewer's use. Pornography teaches girls that they are to be used and teaches boys to be users; and

WHEREAS, Pornography normalizes violence and abuse against women and children by treating women and children as objects, and often depicts rape and abuse as if they are harmless. Moreover,

pornography equates violence towards women and children with sex, and equates pain with pleasure, which increases child sexual abuse and child pornography and the demand for sex trafficking and prostitution, according to a 2012 study published in The Protection Project Journal of Human Rights and Civil Society; and

WHEREAS, The potential detrimental effects on viewers of pornography can impact brain development and functioning, contribute to emotional and medical illnesses, shape deviant sexual arousal, as well as problematic or harmful sexual behaviors and addiction and lead to difficulty in forming or maintaining intimate relationships; and

WHEREAS, Recent research indicates that pornography is potentially biologically addictive, which means the user requires more mental stimulation, often in the form of more shocking material, in order to be satisfied. This biological addiction often leads to increasing themes of risky sexual behaviors, extreme degradation, violence and child sexual abuse images and child pornography; and

WHEREAS, Pornography use is linked to lessened desire in young men and women to marry, dissatisfaction in marriage and infidelity, which has a detrimental effect on the family unit; and

WHEREAS, Pornography has contributed to a rise in the occurrence of erectile dysfunction in young men; and

WHEREAS, Overcoming pornography's harms is extremely difficult for the afflicted individual to address alone: Now, therefore, Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Kansas: That we recognize pornography is a public health hazard that leads

to a broad spectrum of individual and public health impacts and societal harms; and

Be it further resolved: That we recognize the need for additional education, prevention, research and policy change at the community and societal levels, and we urge this chamber and other governing bodies to take appropriate steps to ensure progress is made.

I hereby certify that the above RESOLUTION originated in the HOUSE and was adopted by that body Speaker of the House. Chief Clerk of the House.