STATEMENT

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SAFER AMERICA FOR EVERYONE

S. 2537, DOT KIDS IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFICIENCY ACT OF 2002

SEPTEMBER 12, 2002

Good afternoon, Senator Dorgan, Senator Ensign, and members of the Subcommittee. For the record, my name is Ann Brown, Chairman of SAFE, (Safer America for Everyone). I am also the former Chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. I appreciate your inviting me to testify as a strong supporter of S.2537, the "Dot Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act of 2002."

When I left CPSC last November, I formed SAFE as a non-profit organization to carry on many of the consumer protection activities I began while Chairman of the CPSC, and to expand that work into other areas important to the safety of children -- including Internet safety.

This is why I strongly support the Senate bill today, as I supported this legislation when it passed the House earlier this year.

Nearly 24 million youths today use the Internet. By the year 2005, it is expected that 77 million youth will regularly log on.

SAFE has first-hand knowledge of kids and the Internet. SAFE is currently developing a safety-related website proposal aimed at so-called "tweens," or kids between the ages of 9-13. In one focus group, we asked middle school students how they used the Internet. Virtually every student said they used the Internet for their studies, recreation, chat rooms and instant messaging. In fact, most students said that they had encountered "inappropriate material" on the Internet.

The Crimes Against Children Research Center reported that one in five teenagers who regularly use the Internet have received an unwanted sexual solicitation. They also report that one out of 33 youths have received what is classified as an aggressive sexual solicitation where they are directly trying to solicit a sexual meeting with a teenager.

We hear stories every day about children encountering violence and pornography on the Internet. Earlier this year, a young girl was killed in Danbury, Connecticut by an Internet predator. Many other children have been victimized over the Internet.

As a grandmother of kids who surf the net, I am concerned, as many parents across this nation are, about the dark side of the Internet, which our children can be exposed to through a couple of mouse clicks, or the misspelling of a website name.

Every parent wants to protect their children from a nightmare that no family, no community ever wants to experience.

This legislation creates a safe haven for children. This bill will help preserve our children's innocence and prevent these types of sexual encounters and predators and pornography online. It will create a child-friendly zone within the United States. All contents of this zone will be appropriate for children 12 and under.

Just like a safe playground, our children need a safe place on the Internet to grow, learn, and be entertained – and to avoid the current onslaught of pornography, child predators, and other undesirable information on the World Wide Web.

This legislation would create something akin to a children's section of a library. Whenever I took my daughters when they were young – and now my grandchildren -- to the children's section of the library, I was confident that the books and magazines they found there would be suitable.

I am glad to see safeguards built into the legislation. An independent firm will regularly monitor and immediately remove any content that is harmful to minors. There would be no access to chat rooms. The legislation would bar that. Furthermore, there would not be *any* interactive component here where a predator could break in. These are important provisions since we would not want to open the door of our safe place to any unwanted predators.

This is so our children can have a safe haven.

Mr. Dorgan, and members of the Subcommittee, this legislation makes good sense.

Some may say there are too many safeguards. But my way of thinking is that when you're dealing with children – more is better.

And another thing, some may worry that this bill chills the First Amendment. You know, I'm a big advocate of the First Amendment. I'm not worried. This bill doesn't tell anyone what they can put on a "dot com," or a "dot net," or a "dot org" domain. And, the bill doesn't curtail speech within the "dot us" domain.

The bill only says if you want to operate in the "dot kids" area, you have entered a kid-friendly zone where the content has to be suitable for a child 12 years and under.

The bill also requires the government to publicize the availability of this new domain and to educate parents how to master the technology tools to use it.

This is essential.

You can build a field of dreams, but if nobody knows where it is, they will not come.

I would like to see the Senate pass this bill and give our children a safe haven in this veritable jungle of websites.

And, in the meantime, until we have these safeguards, I would like to suggest that parents follow some basic internet safety tips to help protect their kids. This list appears on the SAFE website at www.saferam.org, and I am pleased to submit a copy for the record today. Thank you.