

OPENING ORAL TESTIMONY FOR THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

September 19, 2006

1. Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before your Committee today and express my views regarding child victimization through pornography. My name is Sharon W. Cooper, MD and I am a Developmental and Forensic Pediatrician. I am the CEO of Developmental & Forensic Pediatrics, PA a consulting firm which provides medical care, research and training, and expert witness testimony for children with disabilities and/or who are victims of all forms of child abuse and neglect. I am an adjunct professor of Pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Medicine and an assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland. I am a retired Army officer, having served for 21 years in numerous military hospitals here in the US and overseas, and achieving the final rank of colonel. I am the lead author of the most comprehensive textbook on child sexual exploitation, a 2-volume compendium entitled: *The Medical, Legal and Social Science Aspects of Child Sexual Exploitation A Comprehensive Review of Pornography, Prostitution, and Internet Crimes* (published in 2005). I have lectured on the subject of child sexual exploitation and particularly child pornography in nearly 100 conferences in the US and numerous foreign countries. I have been an instructor at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for 7 years training attorneys, judges, and investigators regarding all aspects of child sexual exploitation. I am an instructor for the North Carolina Institute of the Government which provides judicial training in of child maltreatment.

2. I am here to speak of victims –not emerging social norms, Internet behaviors of children and youths or criminal justice statistics. I would like to bring to your attention some of the issues relevant to children victimized by sexual abuse with pornographic memorialization. 10 years ago, our texts on child sexual abuse didn't even mention pornography production because it was so rarely reported that our children were in underground magazines or videotapes. Today, specialists in the evaluation of child sexual abuse have to learn how to ask the right questions about the possibility that a child's victimization may have entailed production, dissemination, possession or extortion through the use of child sexual abuse images. Our field of knowledge regarding this insult to injury – the injury being sexual abuse and the insult, keeping a child forever at a certain age and stage of development while being exploited through images, is emerging. It is important to recognize that the majority of victims of sexual abuse do not disclose in childhood. You should know that such maltreatment of children whose brains are still in a state of development has an actual negative neural architectural impact. Furthermore, research from the Kaiser Permanente system in California has confirmed that adverse childhood experiences such as sexual abuse with

- pornography production has lifelong negative physical, reproductive, health risk behaviors (smoking, drinking, drugs, obesity etc.) and mental health impact.
3. The increasing number of images on the Internet of children less than 6 years of age speaks volumes regarding the prurient nature of producers and collectors. Such images that I have reviewed and children in this age group of whom I have medical knowledge, are often victims of sadistic gross sexual assault and sodomy. Witnessing the degree of physical and certainly emotional damage that such children experience in the videoclips now present on the Internet would break your heart. Possession of such images should lead to the stiffest penalty available within the letter of the law. In addition, offender research as well as Internet research reveals that sexual voyeurism online is a highly addictive pastime and the likelihood of recidivism is great, as well as certainly a higher than presumed incidence of actual contact offenses in convicted collectors.
 4. I recently participated as one of only 2 Americans on an international Expert Working group on the subject of child victims of Internet pornography. This working group was held in Sweden and sponsored in part by Save the Children. The outcome of the meeting was the realization that our specialists need immense training in this form of victimization –the fact that these children not only typically do not tell of their abuse, but will in fact, deny the presence of images must not be a deterrent to necessary mental health support. Recent investigations of large international child sexual exploitation rings, reveals that like-minded offenders who are often intrafamilial have little to no remorse regarding the trauma and harm to their own children and those of others. This is the only form of child abuse which almost always comes to the attention of law enforcement first, instead of child protective services. Consequently, child welfare has had to learn about this problem second hand, if they are called at all. This is a form of child abuse which has much more victim impact, because of the close link between exploitation through pornography and the gradual transition into prostitution. This background of having pictures and videos taken of one's sexual abuse is a significant risk for substance abuse, mental health problems, and run away behaviors.
 5. What steps can Congress take to impact this problem of child pornography? Consider an approach to each of the 4 components of the prevention of child abuse: the individual child or youth, the family, the community and society. For the individual child or youth, child sexual abuse prevention strategies as well as online and communication technology safety strategies should be mandated in the health classes of public elementary, middle and high school students (not computer classes). The latter are not always available to all students, but health is usually a requirement and education to prevent compliant victimization with web cams, social networking sites and online dating is a public health issue in America today.

6. A recommendation for family intervention in the prevention of child sexual exploitation would include mandates that federally funded public libraries provide one-on-one tutoring and assistance for any person requesting instruction on how to implement parental controls on their home computers, as well as information regarding filtering, blocking, and tracking software. This information can be computer based but not necessarily web-based and should be on a free computer. Another aspect of prevention of child pornography production would include cessation of the recurrent cycle of sexual offending. All child welfare agencies should maintain digital images of all children who are referred for investigation and abuse. This would allow a congressionally funded secure link between an agency such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and any child protective service unit in the country. When the Child Victims of Internet Pornography (CVIP) analysts are able to regionally focus their efforts to locate a child depicted pornographically on the Internet, such a federally funded link might bring the search to closure if child sexual abuse has already been substantiated and the child is safe from harm. An example of how important child welfare and local law enforcement efforts are was noted just 3 weeks ago at one of the largest child abuse trainings in the US, the Dallas Crimes against Children's Conference. At the site, Attorney General Gonzales commended the new Victim Identification Laboratory which was an online lab of child pornography details open only to law enforcement and prosecutors to see if anyone recognized unknown victims. The very first day that the lab was open, an investigator identified a 5 year old child whose mother's paramour had sexually abused her and who was already convicted and serving a prison sentence. On the one hand, this would be one more case for closure by CVIP, but on the other hand, no one in the investigative and prosecutorial team knew that child pornography was also part of this 5-year-old's victimization.
7. Funding for child welfare agencies to provide education and support for non-offending family members would also begin to help in the area of cessation of recurrent sexual abuse. This funding would include an actual family counseling curriculum provision, and most importantly, training of potential members of the child maltreatment multidisciplinary team at their earliest entry into the field—the undergraduate level. Increased earmarked funding for Winona State University in Minnesota and other public funded colleges around the country which are trying to incorporate child maltreatment education to students in social work, psychology, premed, political science, criminal justice and the computer science fields all of whom are potential team members in child abuse.
8. Congress should encourage industry leaders to assist in public awareness campaigns re: the plight of victims of child sexual abuse images. This would include information regarding good citizenship for bystander youths and warnings for youth offenders, who bully online, commit sexual assaults and extort or exploit victims through cellular phone camera technology and peer to peer networking. Congress should also enhance judicial training for federal, state and

military judges to negate a still pervasive thought that this is a “victimless” crime and these are “just pictures”.

9. Funding for programs which provide housing and education to marginalized youths who are being exploited through prostitution is sorely needed and is quite relevant to child sexual abuse and its associated images because of Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom’s research that revealed that victims of child sexual abuse were 28 times more likely in their lives to be arrested for prostitution. A recent study by ECPAT, USA (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes’) revealed that children and youth internationally trafficked into the US were receiving more support and assistance to escape prostitution, than American children who had been trafficked from one side of our country to another. Research funding but particularly housing assistance through block grants to states would be very useful in this part of intervention of victims.

10. Finally, from a societal perspective of the prevention of child pornography victimization, Congress should strengthen the existing obscenity statutes as our country begins the struggle to diminish the sexualization of children in entertainment, media, fashion, advertising, books, and competitions. The normalization of sexual harm continues to be heavily promoted leading to very negative messages and images, particularly of minority adolescent icons. The juxtaposition of sexuality and violence is not by coincidence and industry leaders must be held accountable. Recent successful civil suits against agencies which exploit youths without proof of age or who are clearly unable even to understand their informed consent rights, are a wake up call that we are beginning to get it. Obscenity and profanity are both seen and heard today, and these constant images and messages are clearly affecting the sexual behaviors and beliefs of our children. Let’s work together outside the box to assist in keeping youths from committing federal offenses by becoming self-exploitive, just because degrading lyrics say it’s the right thing to do.

I would like to thank Chairman McCain for this opportunity to appear before you today express my concerns.