

Exodus Cry Supports CA Bill to Protect Millions of Children from Pornography

AB 3080, to Be Introduced April 16, 2024, Would Require Porn Sites to Verify the Age of its Users
On behalf of its hundreds of thousands of supporters, Exodus Cry endorses AB 3080, a California bill that would require an internet website that publishes obscene or indecent images or videos to verify the age of each individual attempting to access the material, and to prevent access by minors to the material.

Since 2021, Exodus Cry, a California-based anti-trafficking organization, has been calling for laws to protect children from porn exposure by requiring porn sites to use ID-based age verification, ensuring its visitors are at least 18. These laws would protect millions of children from the life-altering effects of underage exposure to porn. Exodus Cry has received nearly 100,000 signatures on its Protect Children Not Porn petition and over 100 anti-trafficking, women's rights and child protection organizations have signed on in support.

The average age of a child being exposed to pornography is 11 years old, but that number keeps dropping. In 2022, Common Sense Media performed a survey of 1,300 minors regarding their consumption of pornography, revealing that 58% were exposed to it accidentally. That study also revealed that nearly a third of underage teens had been exposed to porn during the school day, and of that group, 40% said they had seen pornography at school at least weekly. More than half of teen respondents said they had seen violent and/or aggressive pornography, including that which depicts what appears to be rape, choking, or someone in pain.

Never before has access to the internet been more readily available. As a result, an increasing number of kids are being exposed to violent and graphic sexual content. Sexual assault nurse examiner Heidi Olson, who works directly with child victims of sexual abuse, addressed lawmakers on Capitol Hill during a 2022 symposium Exodus Cry co-hosted, exploring how to protect children online. Olson shared, "There's just a huge amount of kids who are sexually assaulting other kids.... Pornography is not only normalizing sexual violence, but it's contributing to the mental health crisis. It's also culturally grooming an entire generation of kids to not understand what sexual abuse or exploitation is."

Exodus Cry has received thousands of messages and stories from people sharing that underage exposure to pornography negatively impacted their life. Early porn exposure is tied to anxiety, violence, self-loathing, body dysphoria, addiction, and sexual function issues. It is also linked to an increased likelihood of committing sexual assault and rape.

Last month, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit upheld Texas' age verification law. Its ruling stated, "Applying rational-basis review, the age-verification requirement is rationally

related to the government's legitimate interest in preventing minors' access to pornography.... Therefore, the age-verification requirement does not violate the First Amendment."

As of today, 11 states have passed and 26 states have introduced porn site age verification legislation. Exodus Cry Vice President of Impact, Helen Taylor, stated, "Passing age verification legislation to shield children from pornographic websites is one of the single most important actions our state can take to protect millions of children from lifelong sexual trauma."

Just like retail and restaurant establishments are required to make a reasonable effort to verify the age of customers buying alcohol to prevent the negative effects on minors, websites with obscene and indecent material harmful to minors should be required to conduct age verification as well.

To protect California's nine million children, Exodus Cry, along with over 100 other anti-trafficking, women's rights and child protection organizations, supports AB 3080 and urges committee legislators to pass this critical bill.

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