



HENRY McMASTER
GOVERNOR

THE CHILDREN'S INTERNET SAFETY GOVERNOR'S PLEDGE

PREAMBLE

The Internet has become a powerful educational and communications tool, placing vast new worlds of knowledge in the palm of our hands. Today's youth have fully integrated the Internet into their daily lives, using technology as a platform for education, communication, interaction, exploration, and self-expression. The Internet opens its users to a world that is reflective of contemporary human life, providing access to what is good, beneficial, and enriching, but when unrestricted, it also opens doors to what is dangerous, obscene, violent, and criminal.

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the impact of this broad spectrum of dangerous content and activity. Preventing the sexual exploitation of youth online requires a shared responsibility between the public, industry, and government. A growing number of government commissions, task forces, scholars and institutions have recognized the significant risks associated with unfettered Internet access by youth, and they have called upon governments, policymakers, caregivers, industry, and educators to take action.

RECITALS

Whereas, the First Amendment is a foundational cornerstone of the Constitution; however, not all written or visual material is protected under the First Amendment. The United States Supreme Court has ruled there are four categories of pornography that are not entitled to full First Amendment protection and which can be restricted or proscribed altogether. With respect to the Internet, those categories include obscenity and child pornography laws.

Whereas, there are existing federal and state laws in place to criminalize the online sexual predation and sex trafficking of children, as well as obscene pornography and child pornography.

Whereas, Internet safety is now the 4th top ranked issue in the list of health concerns for U.S. children and a growing public health issue. Internet pornography is considered to be "the largest unregulated social experiment in human history."

Whereas, the Internet is a tool frequently used in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The increasing use of the Internet has enabled offenders to groom children online and to exchange information and advice on how to abuse children and avoid detection.

Whereas, it is frequently recommended that we must that analyze areas of overlap between human trafficking, child pornography, obscene pornography and internet crimes against children, examine technological and Internet-based methods used in the perpetration of human trafficking crimes and develop related prevention strategies.

Now, therefore, we pledge to defend the innocence and dignity of America's children by enforcing existing state laws and advancing public policies designed to 1) prevent the sexual exploitation of children in the digital world and 2) make the Internet safer for all.

PLEDGE

As the Governor of my State, I promise to:

- 1) Uphold the rule of law by ensuring the aggressive enforcement of existing state laws to prevent the sexual exploitation of children online, including the state obscenity laws, child pornography laws, sexual predation laws and the sex trafficking laws by:
 - a. Drawing attention to the issue of Internet-based sexual exploitation and working with partners including the state Attorney General to create consensus solutions – both legislative and education-based – to address this issue;
 - b. Encouraging the state legislature to support existing efforts with new policies which will provide law enforcement with the resources and tools needed to investigate and prosecute Internet crimes involving human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children;
 - c. Encouraging state law enforcement to work closely with federal law enforcement to enhance state law enforcement efforts to prevent the sexual exploitation of children;
- 2) Protect and defend the innocence of America's children by advancing public policies that prevent the sexual exploitation of children in a manner that is consistent with the government's compelling interest in protecting its most vulnerable citizens; and
- 3) Give serious consideration to elevating the efforts of our state government to examine and research the harmful public health impact of Internet pornography on youth and the interconnection of sex trafficking, child pornography, obscene pornography and Internet crimes against children. These efforts may include, but are not limited to: establishing state commissions, joint committees, and/or cooperative initiatives with state legislatures; partnering with non-governmental organizations and other experts in the private sector; engaging with academic and medical science practitioners, etc.

Signature:



Date:

