

United States Senate

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JOINT ECONOMIC
COMMITTEE

September 11, 2020

Mr. Reed Hastings, Chairman, President and CEO
Netflix, Inc.
100 Winchester Circle
Los Gatos, CA 95032

Dear Mr. Hastings,

It has come to my attention that Netflix began distributing the controversial film *Cuties* in the United States this week. Many have raised concerns—which I share—regarding the film’s depiction of the exploitation of young girls’ bodies. In part because of scenes depicting scantily clad children dancing in a sexually suggestive manner, Netflix has rated the movie TV-MA, or mature audience only. According to the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, TV-MA applies to a program that is “specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17” due to “crude indecent language, explicit sexual activity or graphic violence.”¹ My concern is not necessarily that the film is rated TV-MA, but that the “explicit sexual activity” that led to the TV-MA rating involves sexually suggestive dancing by girls as young as eleven years old.

While I have concerns with the movie’s young actresses’ influence on other young girls, my larger concern is with the possibility that the inappropriate scenes might encourage the sexual exploitation of young girls by adults. I understand this film contains a broader storyline; however, the film’s sexualization of young girls—if not itself the sexual exploitation of the child actors--will certainly contribute to child sexual exploitation by others. At a minimum, it is certainly inappropriate and morally wrong to sexualize minors, regardless of whether the depiction is fictional.

The federal government currently spends hundreds of millions of dollars combating child trafficking, child sexual exploitation, and child pornography both domestically and abroad. Sadly, human trafficking is estimated to generate global profits of approximately \$150 billion per year - \$99 billion of that is estimated to come from sexual exploitation.² Unfortunately, child sexual exploitation is a prevalent problem in the United States. In 2009, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates “between 244,000 and 325,000 American youth are considered at risk for

¹TV Parental Guidelines, Ratings Fact Sheet, <http://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/TheRatings.pdf>.

² “Human Trafficking Is an Epidemic in the U.S. It’s Also Big Business”, Jaclyn Gallucci, Fortune Magazine, April 14, 2019, at <https://fortune.com/2019/04/14/human-sex-trafficking-us-slavery/>.

sexual exploitation, and an estimated 199,000 incidents of sexual exploitation of minor occur each year in the United States.”³

My staff is reviewing the film and the pertinent law to determine whether to refer the presentation of this film to the United States Attorney General for investigation. It would be most helpful if you could provide my office with an explanation on your views as to whether or not the potential exploitation of minors in this film constitutes criminal behavior by Friday, September 18, 2020. In the interest of protecting children in both the United States and internationally from this horrible abuse, I call on Netflix to cease distributing this movie.

Sincerely,



Senator Michael S. Lee

³ Department of Health and Human Services, “Human Trafficking Into and Within the United States: A Review of the Literature”, August 30, 2009, at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/human-trafficking-and-within-united-states-review-literature#Trafficking>.