



The Honorable Mike Lee

PROTECT ACT OF 2026

The Preventing Rampant Online Technological and Criminal Trafficking Act of 2026 (PROTECT Act) would require sites that host pornography to verify the age of individuals uploading content, or appearing in uploaded content, and would also require websites to collect written consent forms for uploaded content.

BACKGROUND

Online pornography is one of the most lucrative and fastest growing industries in the world. The leading pornography website, for example, reported attracting more than 3,500,000,000 monthly users, exceeding the combined traffic of Netflix, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Much of the material on these sites is the product of sex trafficking and child exploitation.

The rapid growth in production and monetization of child pornography, or child sexual abuse materials (“CSAM”), is of great concern. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children recorded more than 29,300,000 reports of suspected CSAM to its CyberTipline in 2021. This was the highest number of reports ever recorded, and a 35% increase from the number of reports received in 2020. This sharp increase in the amount of CSAM online is accompanied by an increase in the violent and graphic nature of these images and videos.

While law enforcement has made great strides in finding and prosecuting individuals who distribute child sexual abuse materials, their resources are limited and the problem is overwhelming. The FBI, for example, has had to prioritize the investigation of images depicting infants and toddlers. This severe imbalance has left countless older children and trafficked adults with no avenue for justice or healing when their images are shared by these pornographic websites.

Meanwhile, pornography sites make virtually no effort to combat this problem. The pornographic film industry is worth an estimated \$97 billion dollars—rivaling the revenue of Hollywood, and more than the combined revenues of the NFL, NBA, and MLB—yet the industry is largely immune from regulation. The vast majority of pornography sites make no effort to verify the age, consent, or identify of individuals appearing in content uploaded to their sites. This enables human traffickers to profit off of underage or nonconsenting individuals through forced participation in the production of pornographic content. Every time a pornographic image or video featuring a nonconsenting individual is viewed or shared, the trauma to that individual, and the profit for the trafficker, increases.

Pornography sites need to be held to a reasonable standard to prevent the exploitation that is occurring on their platforms. Victims need to be able to remove images shared without their consent. The PROTECT Act is a step in that direction.

WHAT THE BILL DOES

First, this law would require websites to verify the age and identity of individuals uploading pornographic images. Failure to comply with this section would result in a \$10,000 per day per image civil penalty and additional criminal penalties.

Second, this law would also require pornography sites to verify that each individual appearing in uploaded content is 1) not a minor, 2) has provided written consent for each depicted sex act, and 3) has consented to the distribution of the content. Failure to follow these requirements would result in a civil penalty for both the uploader and the hosting platform of up to \$10,000 per day per image and additional criminal penalties.

Overall, this law would require pornography platforms to reasonably engage in the fight against human trafficking by eliminating the ability of traffickers to upload and monetize nonconsensual content involving both children and adults on pornographic platforms.

Please contact Leo_OMalley@judiciary-rep.senate.gov, senior counsel to Sen. Mike Lee, with any questions.