

## Background

The average age of a child's first exposure to internet pornography is just 11 years old.<sup>1</sup> Blocking and filtering software has proven ineffective, with nearly 80% of minors in the U.S. between the ages of 12 and 17 having been exposed to pornography.<sup>2</sup> Much of pornography is violent and degrading, glamorizing assault, physical abuse, and non-consensual acts. Studies show that children who view pornography internalize and emulate the harmful behaviors they see on the screen.<sup>3</sup> As one study succinctly put it:

*Early exposure to pornography is connected to negative developmental outcomes, including a greater acceptance of sexual harassment, sexual activity at an early age, acceptance of negative attitudes to women, unrealistic expectations, skewed attitudes of gender roles, greater levels of body dissatisfaction, rape myths (responsibility for sexual assault to a female victim) and sexual aggression.<sup>4</sup>*

Age verification laws receive overwhelming bipartisan support throughout the country. At least 16 states have declared youth exposure to pornography to be a serious public health issue, and 19 states have enacted some form of website age verification requirement. The Supreme Court is poised to rule on an age verification law, and whether they apply strict scrutiny or a lower form of judicial review, it is abundantly clear that the SCREEN Act is the answer.

## SCREEN Act

This bill requires all commercial pornographic websites to adopt age verification technology to ensure a child cannot access its pornographic content.

- Age verification requirements include:
  - Prohibition on simple age attestation (i.e., simply entering in a birthdate)
  - Requires IP address verification and public transparency of the process
  - Allows companies to choose verification measures and contract with third parties;
  - Implements data security requirements
  - Prohibits companies from collecting unnecessary data beyond verifying a user's age and from retaining information longer than is necessary to demonstrate compliance
- Violations are treated as an unfair or deceptive act or practice under section 18(a)(1)(B) of the FTC Act. This mirrors COPPA enforcement authority.
  - Requires consultation with appropriate experts for enforcement
  - Requires regular audits to ensure compliance
- Directs GAO to report on compliance and issue recommendations to Congress.

**Endorsements:** NCOSE, National Decency Coalition, Heritage Action, Ethics and Public Policy Center, American Principles Project, Family Policy Alliance, Institute for Family Studies, Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Culture Reframed, Enough is Enough, Envoc, Foundation and Council on Pornography Reform, Eagle Forum, Eagle Forum of Alabama, The Silent Addiction.

<sup>1</sup> Watkins, *Impact of Pornography on Youth*, 57 J. Am. Acad. Child & Adolescent Psychiatry 89 (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Barna, *Teens and Young Adults Use Porn More Than Anyone Else*, Barna Group (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Rodenhizer & Edwards, *The Impacts of Sexual Media Exposure on Adolescent and Emerging Adults' Dating and Sexual Violence Attitudes and Behaviors: A Critical Review of the Literature*, 20 Trauma, Violence, & Abuse 439 (2019).

<sup>4</sup> Coca & Wikle, *What Happens When Children Are Exposed to Pornography?*, Inst. for Family Studies (2024).