

Opening Statement for Chairman Gus Bilirakis
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on: The World Wild Web: Examining Harms Online
March 26, 2025

Good morning, everyone and welcome to today's subcommittee hearing to examine risks to Americans' safety online.

Today's hearing is incredibly important, and I am thankful we are hitting the ground early this Congress to protect ourselves from dangers in the online world.

Technology has created a wonderful tool to gather information and connect us to the world. But with every new, great tool, malicious actors have found a way to reconfigure technology to spread malice and harm people across the globe. While Congress has looked to build walls preventing these harms from occurring, we have failed to keep pace with technology.

Take for example the important work Congress did to combat the sexual exploitation of children.

When Congress first worked on this issue, it was hard to imagine Artificial Intelligence could be used to create fake, but life-like, non-consensual intimate images of children. Worse still, it was hard to imagine anyone so vile who would actually do it.

But today, detestable people are extorting children with technology, creating these images and uploading them online for the world to see. And it doesn't stop with deepfakes either, criminals are masking themselves as friends or romantic partners to solicit intimate authentic images of children and ransoming these images for a quick buck. The pain these children experience is horrid, and it breaks my heart.

Yiota, thank you for your work at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and for providing your expertise. I'm looking forward to your testimony on why Congress must act immediately to stop this abhorrent practice.

Congress must take a holistic approach to establish protections online, which is why I'm so proud to see many of our members working on different mechanisms to protect our children.

I for one am eager to move the ball forward on the Kids Online Safety Act. While this is not a legislative hearing, I'm hoping we can use this hearing to improve the legislation and enact a law that provides parents with the tools they need while also targeting illegal content from ever making its way to children's screens in the first place. Parents know their children the best, so we must adequately equip them with the tools they need to protect their families.

Unfortunately, it is clear the existing tools don't work. I am tired of hearing Big Tech insist that solutions are already in place when it is clear they are not working. The very companies that

have positioned themselves as the gatekeepers of our children's online safety continue to let us down. Dawn and Clare, thank you for being here to share your experiences and your commitment to driving real change.

This hearing should not be partisan, it is far too important of an issue to use as a political circus. Many of us here today have introduced or are working on legislation to build protections from harms online – this is not partisan issue and impacts every one of our districts.

In 2022, McKenna Brown, a 16-year-old from Tampa Bay, tragically took her life after being victimized by cyber-bullying through multiple social media apps and text messages. McKenna's parents knew none of this until it was too late. Since then, her mother Cheryl, has been an advocate for change, urging lawmakers to give parents the tools necessary to keep kids safe.

I also understand there are similarly situated parents in the audience. And I want to recognize your own stories, efforts, and commitment to protect children from online harms.

So, I am hopeful we can work with our friends across the aisle and use this hearing as the catalyst to move important protections for children across the finish line and bring about a safer online experience for all, but especially our children. The risks are too severe for us to fail.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today and sharing your expertise with us. I yield back and recognize my friend, Ms. Schakowsky, the ranking member of the subcommittee.