

Rep. Ann Wagner (MO-02) Statement for the House Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance Hearing on the Threat of Exploitation of Children in the U.S. and Abroad

I want to thank Chairman Biggs for holding this important hearing and thank Congressman Fry for submitting these remarks on my behalf.

Make no mistake. There is a child exploitation crisis happening in the United States.

While this issue has been rising over the past two decades, the pandemic exacerbated online exploitation and abuse to unprecedented levels.

Last year, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received over 32 million reports on online child sexual abuse material, or CSAM.

That's 32 million reports of images and videos of children being raped and sexually assaulted that are circulating freely online.

This represents an 89% increase from pre-pandemic levels in 2019 and is equal to approximately 87,600 reports of online child sexual exploitation per day.

Under current law, online platforms are required to report CSAM to the NCMEC CyberTipline when it appears on their platform. However, there are no requirements regarding what these platforms must include in a CyberTipline report.

Due to this legal gap, platforms do not consistently report substantive and actionable information in their reports—leaving NCMEC and law enforcement often unable to locate and rescue the child.

In 2022, over 50% of the 32 million reports submitted to NCMEC lacked so much information that the report could not be investigated by law enforcement.

My legislation, the Child Online Safety Modernization Act, would address this problem directly.

H.R. 5182 would enhance the NCMEC CyberTipline by requiring reports from online platforms to include information that actually helps law enforcement identify and locate the child depicted in CSAM as well as the individuals involved in posting the imagery.

My bill would also extend the required preservation of CyberTipline reports from 90 days to 1 year.

Due to the immense volume of these reports and the deliberative and time-consuming process that an investigation of these cases requires, extending this preservation will give law enforcement more time to properly and comprehensively investigate crimes against children.

Lastly, this bill would replace the term “child pornography” with “child sexual abuse material” throughout U.S. federal statutes. “Child pornography” is an inaccurate and misleading term to describe an image or video of a child being raped.

