

February 1, 2023

To: Montana House Energy, Technology and Federal Relations Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 349

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak today on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our support for House Bill 349.

I suspect that all too often, the issue of pornography is viewed as primarily a private matter. Perhaps this is even more true today since so much of pornographic material is consumed via electronic means. But while there is no doubt a very private dimension to the consumption of pornography, it is also true that there are very devastating social ramifications, the impacts of which are felt throughout our families and the entire social fabric of our state. Therefore, it is incumbent upon policymakers to consider the impact pornography has on the common good.

House Bill 349 seeks to address one of the most vulnerable populations impacted by the widespread distribution of and easy access to pornography—our children. I expect other proponents will lay out the statistics regarding the staggering number of children being exposed to pornography at an early age and the tragic frequency with which young kids, through no fault of their own, accidentally stumble into the world of online pornography. Those first images they see cannot simply be forgotten or ignored. They are seared into their memory and the impression left can, in an instant, rip away a child's innocence drastically harming the natural and proper process of sexual, moral and emotional development to which every child is entitled.

And what do those harms look like?

Children exposed to pornography are at risk of becoming conditioned to view sexual harm as normative increasing likelihoods that they will become victims or victimizers. Consumption of pornography by children can shape negative attitudes and behaviors towards women including aggression. It can lead to problems with addiction and the various attendant consequences of such. And, not surprisingly, when children are exposed to pornography it can severely affect their ability to develop and maintain proper healthy intimate relationships. In other words, pornography poisons our children jeopardizing their ability flourish and develop into adults capable of functioning in a manner that builds up society.

House Bill 349 takes meaningful steps to help protect our young people—young people who depend on us to provide them with the social environment necessary for their healthy development.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a “do pass” and thank you for your time.