

President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20050

February 3, 2023

Call To Address Online and Offline Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents in the United States

Dear President Biden:

We represent leading organizations working to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children and adolescents that occurs both online and offline. Many of us are survivors of abuse in childhood ourselves and operate with substantial input and involvement of survivors. We applaud your editorial in the Wall Street Journal earlier this month calling for action to address the online exploitation of children. We could not agree more that the time is now to take action on child sexual abuse online and offline. We support the Administration's efforts to address sexual violence against children as part of the interconnected priorities in the National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality and in the work of the White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse. We ask that you continue to act on behalf of the children by specifically addressing online and offline child sexual abuse through prevention, healing, and justice measures.

Sexual violence against children and adolescents in the United States is rampant. In 2021, NCMEC's CyberTipline received 29.3 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation, an increase of 35% from 2020 and 73% from 2019. Ninety-nine percent of these reports were of suspected child sexual abuse materials (CSAM). It is horrific that child abuse images, videos and depictions are so prevalent online. The widespread production, distribution and consumption of CSAM points not only to the need to prevent the creation of and remove this content online, but also to rescue children who are being abused on a multitude of online platforms, as well as in offline circumstances – while at home, at school, in sports, at church, and in other community organizations and activities. It is important to remember that children are at risk not only from strangers, but also from people they know in their families, friends, and other adults in their circle of trust.

For a variety of reasons, child sexual abuse is woefully underreported. Statistics indicate that one in ten children is sexually abused before their 18th birthday in the United States. Rates of sexual violence are seven to 10 times higher for children and adolescents with cognitive and physical disabilities. Gender nonconforming, transgender children and LGBTQ+ children are at greater risk. Studies show that 13% of athletes experience sexual abuse at least once as a child

in sports. At current youth sports participation levels in this country, there are an estimated 5.91 million survivors of sexual abuse in sports in the United States alone. These realities point to an ongoing, pervasive public health crisis.

The mental health costs of this abuse are astounding. The annual economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States is estimated to be at least \$9.3 billion. The economic cost of this abuse only compounds over time. Sexual abuse and exploitation results in grave physical and psychological trauma and exacts tremendous social, safety and economic costs on survivors, as well as society. Research shows that those who were sexually abused in childhood are more likely to end up in adult relationships where they are the victim of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. In some cases, victims of abuse may even become abusive themselves. This connection makes it critical that the Administration continues to prioritize action on sexual violence that occurs during the early stages of life under all circumstances – online and offline.

Sadly, the United States is not alone in this battle against online and offline child sexual abuse, which remains a global crisis. Many countries around the world are taking steps to address the scourge of sexual abuse online and offline. The European Union is currently working to develop laws to give children greater protection online. The Australian government has enacted numerous measures to ensure greater protection for children from predators online and offline including the establishment of an E-Safety Commissioner. At the 2022 G7 convenings, countries agreed to take action to address child sexual abuse. As President of the United States, you can lead the world on this issue by giving a voice to survivors and generating fundamental, systemic change. In a country that serves as a beacon of hope and leadership to so many others, it is imperative that we address this crisis.

Your illustrative leadership as the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, led to Congress finally taking action to address violence against women and children, including passage of the Violence Against Women Act, the PROTECT Our Children Act, the Victims of Crime Act, and the Victims of Child Abuse Act, and momentous change for those most at risk and greater support for survivors. You can once again be the champion for the most vulnerable by taking action for children at risk of experiencing one of the worst forms of violence and survivors in the United States and around the world. Utilizing the expansive power of the federal government, you can tackle online and offline child sexual abuse through a survivor-centered approach focused on prevention, healing, and justice. An Executive Order on this issue would strengthen the federal response and provide for better interagency coordination to combat this abuse.

As you mentioned in the Wall Street Journal earlier this month, Congress and the private sector will be essential in these efforts. We agree with your calls to put forth “bipartisan proposals to protect our privacy and our children; to prevent discrimination, sexual exploitation, and cyberstalking.” We agree these are “shared values” that can unite our country and provide inspiration to the rest of the world to take up this daunting task. We have seen bipartisan legislative action on this issue over the last two years, and we believe that there is momentum for even greater legislative action over the next two years. Members of Congress on both sides

of the aisle supported legislation to reauthorize the Victims of Child Abuse Act and the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force as well as legislation to remove the statute of limitations for civil cases of child sexual abuse. Protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation transcends party lines.

As organizations dedicated to the protection of children, we request that you consider the following proposals in your efforts to advance this cause:

- 1) Invest in programs that prevent initial perpetration of child sexual abuse and exploitation, including through technology-facilitated interactions, to help reduce the number of incidents. Resources and training should be provided to educate all children, youth, parents, and child-serving professionals on how to prevent, identify and respond to online and offline child sexual abuse and exploitation through programs that are survivor-centered and trauma-informed. Research on the effectiveness of prevention and education programs should also continue and be expanded. It is also essential to increase access for children and youth to readily available, high-quality mental health and counselling services to support resiliency and reduce vulnerability to targeting and grooming online.
- 2) Establish a senior leadership position in the White House to coordinate action at the federal level on all forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. This would demonstrate your Administration's commitment to this issue by directing federal agencies under your purview to act and sending a strong signal to Congress to do the same. A nationwide strategy that includes proactive approaches and identifies necessary resources for the rescue of children from sexual exploitation and abuse is warranted and would be most effective. Informed perspectives from the field at the state and local level is also critical – federal leadership would help gather these invaluable inputs.
- 3) Mobilize financial resources in the upcoming budget for federal domestic and global agency programs that focus on prevention efforts and healing and justice for survivors, as well as improved data collection and research on the global and national prevalence of online and offline childhood sexual violence, as well as risk and protective factors particularly for children with disabilities, children from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds, children that identify as LGBTQI, child runaways and victims of child trafficking.
- 4) Work with Congress to develop comprehensive national legislation to include policies, programs, and research to prevent all forms of sexual violence against children, protect and support healing for survivors, reduce the cost of sexual violence to society, and provide access to justice for victims.
- 5) Improve support for child survivors of all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation by increasing investment in and the availability of comprehensive, victim-centered and trauma-informed assistance programs, including mental health treatment, counseling

and legal services led by professionals specifically trained to support survivors of childhood sexual abuse and exploitation as part of larger efforts to break the life-cycle of abuse and to aid in healing. Conduct regular consultations with adult survivors of all forms of childhood sexual abuse and exploitation to ensure policies and programs reflect their experiences, ideas, and solutions.

- 6) Increase efforts to improve existing technology and develop new technology, including age verification, anti-grooming and child sexual abuse material detection tools, to better protect children online. Hold technology companies accountable for utilizing these tools to develop safe, age-appropriate internet experiences for child users that centers their wellbeing and best interests, being transparent around their risk assessment and mitigation efforts to prevent and respond to online harms against children, cooperating with law enforcement investigations of these crimes, and improving efforts to detect, report and remove CSAM as quickly as possible to ensure survivors are not further victimized.
- 7) Provide additional funding to increase the staffing, incentives and training of law enforcement officers tasked with investigating online sexual exploitation and abuse of children cases, including capacity-building on the latest investigative techniques and tools and ensure funding is available to continue to build partnerships with other countries to jointly investigate cross-national cases and support opportunities for information sharing, training and learning.
- 8) Increase funding to support Homeland Security child exploitation investigative efforts at home and abroad to interdict child sexual abuse material offenders and to increase efforts to identify children seen in these materials who remain unidentified.
- 9) Expand U.S. support for global programs to end sexual violence against children through U.S. foreign assistance programs and collaboration with foreign governments, multilateral agencies, academic institutions, and civil society.

Finally, we urge an approach to the above that is survivor-centered, acknowledging the unique expertise and importance of survivors' lived experiences and perspectives, and provides substantive room for survivor leadership and advice to inter-agency stakeholders.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. Should questions arise, if you need additional information, or if you or your staff would like to discuss these issues, please contact Katy Flynn with the Keep Kids Safe Movement, Kflynn@keep.kids.safe.org or Danielle Lilly with the End Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children Coalition at DLilly@childfund.org or any of the organizations listed below.

Sincerely,

Darkness to Light	National Childrens Alliance	Together for Girls
Childfund International	The Army of Survivors	Augusta Associates, LLC
Enough is Enough	Keeping Children Safe USA Inc	Global Hope 365
Protect Young Eyes	WeProtect Global Alliance	National Child Protection Task Force
Thorn	The Carly Ryan Foundation	Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests
RAINN	Brave Movement	Keep Kids Safe Movement
Lynn's Warriors	International Justice Mission	Rights4Girls
UNICEF USA	Fairplay	National Criminal Justice Training Center
ECPAT-USA	The Monique Burr Foundation	