

Statement of  
**The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
April 16, 2008

Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy  
Chairman, Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
On "Challenges and Solutions for Protecting Our Children from Violence  
in the 21st Century"  
April 16, 2008

Today the Judiciary Committee considers the issue of how to protect our most precious resource - our children and grandchildren - in these complicated and sometimes dangerous times. It is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, and we need to do all that we can to protect our children from becoming victims of crime. I thank Senator Biden for holding this hearing and for his leadership on the issues of internet safety and crime prevention.

This Committee has been actively working to find ways for the Federal government to contribute to keeping our children safer. In December we reported for consideration by the full Senate three important pieces of internet safety and child protection legislation. The Committee passed legislation that reauthorizes the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), an admirable organization that spearheads national efforts to locate and recover missing children and raises public awareness about ways to prevent child abduction, molestation, and sexual exploitation. Further, NCMEC works to make our children safer by acting as a national voice and advocate for those too young to vote or speak up for their own rights.

The Committee also reported out the Internet Safety and Education Act, which sets up a grant program to give educators and parents the tools necessary to teach proper online interactions and promote safe Internet usage to their students and children in an age-appropriate manner. Lastly, the Committee unanimously reported Senator Schumer's KIDS Act, which would strengthen the nation's sex offender registry. While all of these bills have broad bipartisan support, a few Senators have placed holds on them, so far preventing them from passing the full Senate. I urge that the holds be lifted and that the full Senate pass these important bills.

Today's hearing focuses on S. 1738, the Combating Child Exploitation Act, a bill sponsored by Senator Biden. The bill continues the important work the Committee has been doing to keep our children safe. It seeks to streamline the protection and investigation of child exploitation cases by establishing a Special Counsel for Child Exploitation Prevention within the Department of Justice, and to combine state, local, and Federal insight into how best to address the growing problem of child exploitation on the Internet through creation of an Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. I hope that this legislation will provide another chance for the Judiciary

Committee to show that, by working together and incorporating new technology, we can make important strides to protect America's children from exploitation.

The Judiciary Committee has also been hard at work considering legislation that addresses other important aspects of the problem of how best to protect our children. This hearing on protecting our children from violence takes place on the first anniversary of the horrific incident at Virginia Tech that resulted in the tragic deaths of 32 students and faculty members, and serious injuries to many other innocent victims. Our hearts go out to the victims' families as they mourn their loved ones who tragically lost their lives before their time. Our sympathies also go out to the survivors of this terrible incident, as well as the entire Virginia Tech community, whose resilient spirit and courage in the face of tragedy over the past year have been truly remarkable.

Eight months ago, the Senate Judiciary Committee took a step to make our schools and college campuses safer when it reported the School Safety and Law Enforcement Improvement Act of 2007, S. 2084. Regrettably, the Senate has failed to take up and pass that bill to improve school safety. Today reminds us why this comprehensive legislation should be considered and passed without further delay.

Finally, the Judiciary Committee is hard at work putting together legislation to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. One of the best ways to keep all of our children safe is to find and advance the best approaches for keeping young people from turning to violence in the first place. Our recent hearing in Rutland, Vermont, on the rise of drug-related violent crime in rural areas also shed light on the effectiveness of programs which keep young people away from drugs and violence and on the need to a comprehensive approach to combating violent crime.

The Senate Judiciary Committee has been taking just such a comprehensive approach to the issue of keeping our children safe by exploring and addressing the problem from all sides. I thank Senator Biden and today's witnesses for their contributions to this important effort.

#####