TESTIMONY BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND COUNTERTERRORISM

Roblox and Online Gaming: Digital Playgrounds Endangering America's Children

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Chairman Hawley, Ranking Member Durbin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story. I'm a proud United States Marine Corps veteran, a husband, and, most importantly, a father to four children, all under the age of seven.

For six years, I served my country as a Marine. I dedicated myself to becoming stronger, both physically and mentally. But some of the deepest wounds I carry today came long before I ever put on that uniform.

I was just 11 years old when I was groomed and sexually assaulted by a man I met on Roblox.

For much of my life, I struggled to understand how something that happened when I was a child could continue to affect the man I was becoming. It started with a game I loved. Like millions of children, I discovered Roblox and quickly became hooked. It was a game designed for kids, and I wanted to be part of it.

Eventually, I joined a group that hosted games where players could use virtual items purchased with Robux, Roblox's online currency. One day, an administrator unexpectedly kicked me out of the group. When I tried to rejoin, another player reached out and offered to help. He told me his name was Chris. He said he was a kid who went to school nearby. He even told me he knew where I went to school. I believed him.

Chris told me I could rejoin the group if I paid Robux. When I told him I didn't have any money, he offered to pay for me if I would send him pictures of myself. I remember going into the bathroom to take those pictures. Something felt wrong, but I was just a kid. I wanted so badly to be part of this community. I sent him the photos.

Afterward, Chris praised me and sent me Robux. He also told me other members of the group had seen the photographs.

Even after all these years, I still remember the feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach.

I begged them to delete the pictures. I was so afraid someone from school or my parents would see them. But Chris demanded I send more. When I told him no, the group began threatening me. At the time, I didn't understand I was being groomed and exploited. I was a child who believed he had done something wrong, and I was desperate to keep anyone from finding out.

Eventually, I reached out to Chris again, hoping he would stop threatening me. He told me he lived in Venus, Texas, not far from my home. One day, while my parents were working late, I had a friend's older brother drop me off at the address he provided. An older man answered the

door. I assumed he was Chris's father and asked if Chris was home. He invited me inside. When I asked again, he told me that *he* was Chris. I immediately knew something was very wrong.

Pornography was playing on the television. The man left the room briefly and returned without his pants on. He sat beside me, close enough that I could smell his breath. Then, he pulled me toward him and sexually assaulted me.

People talk about how sexual assault survivors respond with a fight or flight instinct. But they don't often talk about how so many of us freeze. That's what happened to me. I couldn't move. My chest hurt. I couldn't breathe. I told him I needed my inhaler. When he stepped into another room, I left through a side door and made it home.

When I got home, I deleted everything connected to Roblox, including the messages Chris sent in which he threatened to hurt me and my family if I told anyone. And I believed him. So, I stayed silent.

For years, I carried the shame of what happened. I thought it was my fault. I thought I had put myself in that situation. I told myself I should've known better.

I took up weightlifting after the assault. My dad and I weightlifted together. I admired my father and the strong, successful men around me. I wanted to become someone like them. Someone who was strong, capable, and in control.

Looking back, I understand I was trying to rebuild something that had been taken from me when I was 11 years old.

When I joined the Marine Corps, I poured everything I had into my service. I volunteered for additional duties, deployments, and opportunities to take on more responsibility. I pushed myself constantly, determined to become the strongest and most capable version of myself. I believed that if I worked hard enough, accomplished enough, and became strong enough, I could leave that frightened little boy behind. But I couldn't.

I was still carrying the pain and powerlessness of what happened to me, even when I didn't recognize it. And my efforts to bury those feelings came at a cost. I was away for work so much that my marriage and family life suffered.

I watched the birth of my second daughter through a screen because I had volunteered to be away from home. I will never get that moment back.

I had devoted so much of myself to becoming stronger and proving what I was capable of that I didn't recognize how much of my life was still being shaped by what happened to me as a child.

During my military service, I also volunteered to become a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response coordinator within my squadron. Preventing sexual assault became deeply personal to me. I wanted to do everything I could to make sure other people never experienced the fear, humiliation, and powerlessness I had endured.

My chaplain noticed how seriously I took that responsibility. Eventually, I trusted him enough to tell him about my own experience with childhood sexual abuse. For years, I had carried the belief that what happened was somehow my fault. My chaplain helped me understand something I had struggled to accept for most of my life.

I was an innocent child. I had done nothing to deserve what happened to me.

He encouraged me to talk about my experience and helped me recognize the unhealthy ways I had been coping with my trauma. For the first time, I started to understand that healing didn't mean becoming strong enough to forget what happened. It meant learning that I didn't have to blame myself anymore.

I'm still learning how to live with what happened to me. Even with therapy and the support of people who love me, there are parts of that frightened little boy I still carry today. But I'm working to break the patterns that held me back for so long, rebuild my relationships, and become the husband and father I want to be.

When I became a father, it changed the way I understood what happened to me. When my kids became interested in online gaming, I found myself confronting fears I thought I had left behind.

I remembered how innocent it all seemed when I first started playing Roblox. How easily I trusted someone who pretended to be my friend. How quickly that person gained control over me. And I thought about my parents. They had no idea what was happening to me. They believed I was safe at home, playing a game made for children.

Now, as a father, I understand how terrifying it is to know that someone could be exploiting your child without you ever realizing it. I monitor the games my children play and block content I believe is inappropriate. But I know firsthand that even the most attentive parents cannot always see the dangers their children encounter online.

I think about the children who might be experiencing the same fear I felt. Children who believe they're responsible for what happened to them. Children who are being threatened into silence. Children who may spend years, or even decades, trying to recover.

I know what that feels like because I will always have to live with what happened to me.

Today, I have a lawsuit pending against Roblox for the role the company played in facilitating my grooming and sexual abuse. Hundreds of other families have filed similar cases and many of those families are sitting behind me today. I know that no lawsuit can erase what happened to me. But I hope these cases will force Roblox to confront the harm children have experienced on its platform and make meaningful changes to protect them.

I am also deeply concerned that Roblox is trying to force many of these cases out of public courtrooms and into secret forced arbitrations. For survivors who have spent years afraid to speak, being heard matters. I am asking Congress to help protect our rights to seek accountability and to ensure that the safety of children is never treated as less important than a company's profits.

I cannot go back and protect the 11-year-old boy I once was. I cannot change what happened to him or the years he spent believing it was his fault. But I can speak for him today. And I can do everything in my power to protect my children and help prevent another child from experiencing the same pain.

What happened to me lasted only a short time. The impact has lasted most of my life.

No other child should have to carry that burden.

Thank you.