

## Senate Judiciary Committee

Our son, Walker Montgomery died on December 1, 2022 to an online scheme known as sextortion. In Walker's case, he was a well-adjusted young man (16 years old) with a great nuclear family, a tremendous friend group both at school and at church, and was very involved in sports. His passion was football and spending time with family on our farm.

At midnight December 1<sup>st</sup> someone pretending to be a young teenage girl messaged Walker through Instagram. Walker believed she was a "friend" of his contacts, this is part of the tactics used to build credibility. The conversation started innocently but led to Walker being coaxed into a sexual encounter. This encounter occurred over the live video portal through Instagram. What Walker didn't know, he was being recorded from the other side by a predator in Nigeria. After the encounter was over this person turned the conversation into an extortion scheme, if Walker didn't pay \$1,000, he would send the video of Walker in this act to all of his friends and family. The encounter started at midnight and was over between 3:00 – 4:00 a.m. with Walker taking his own life. Almost instantly, our son was gone and it was the beginning of a whole new life for everyone who loved Walker.

As parents, we thought we were doing everything right, we sent our kids to the right school, taught them how to work, and to respect their elders. All the attributes we normally associate with great kids. Looking back, we don't regret our parenting methods, we regret not understanding the risks that social media and the internet pose to children. As parents, we must have help from our lawmakers to protect our children. We are not asking for the government to parent our kids, we are asking it to come along side of us just as it's done with many other damaging activities in the past. Other areas where laws were implemented to protect children include minimum age requirements on alcohol and tobacco. The government knew that it held a valuable role in setting laws and a precedence that would help parents prevent addiction that could lead to harmful effects to children.

This particular online harm is becoming more advanced, just recently a young man in Kentucky was lost to sextortion, but in this case the predator used AI generated content. Children, especially teenage boys, are at a higher risk to this heinous crime. To date we have lost 46 teenagers to suicide due to sextortion through social media. That number of suicides has doubled since last year (2024). They are more prone to participate and more likely to harm themselves when things go wrong. Again, the FBI is warning families about the surge in financial sextortion schemes "TARGETING" minors.

We are grateful for lawmakers working to protect children but we must consider this urgent, our family knows first-hand how devastating this can be. It's reasonable for Federal Regulations to place safeguards on tech companies that provide their products to minor children. In our case, if

Meta would have routed this contact through us, Walker's parents or simply blocked the access from an unknown account he would be here today. Meta knew then about the harmful effects of their products on children and did nothing but continue to cash stock checks.

Please consider the devastating harms these products cause kids and families and move forward with legislation to help protect children.

Thank you,  
Brian and Courtney Montgomery