

**Answers to Questions for the Record Following a U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearing
on
“Protecting Innocence in a Digital World”**

On July 9 2019 the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary held a hearing at which Stephen Balkam, CEO of the Family Online Safety Institute, testified about “Protecting Innocence in a Digital World.”¹ After the hearing Senator Grassley submitted questions for the record. This document provides FOSI’s answers.

Senator Grassley

Question: Human traffickers know that children use social media and other internet platforms frequently, so they take advantage of apps, websites, and other platforms to exploit them. This is particularly concerning because of the constantly changing digital landscape.

How can apps, websites, and other online platforms protect children from inappropriate content?

Answer:

The best way to ensure that children remain safe from human traffickers and are not exposed to inappropriate content on the Internet is to engage all parts of the online safety ecosystem.

This includes government, industry, law enforcement, parents, teachers, and children working cohesively to achieve a culture of responsibility resulting in empowerment and protection online. Encouraging open communication between children and their parents and caregivers is a vital foundation to provide children with proper support and guidance if they are contacted by strangers on the Internet or come across upsetting material. Government should make sure that the appropriate laws are in place to respond to the crime of human trafficking in particular, and that prosecutions are encouraged and supported.

Concurrently, industry must ensure that they have provided users with effective blocking tools to prevent unwanted contact, as well as reporting tools that flag dangerous accounts or inappropriate content for moderation or removal. These companies must also facilitate working relationships with law enforcement in order to do everything within their power to protect children and support the conviction of offenders.

¹ <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Balkam%20Testimony.pdf>