

ILLINOIS *Family* INSTITUTE

IFI Supports HB 2458 – Internet filtering in taxpayer-funded libraries

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House Bill 2458 would require all libraries receiving state funds to use filter technology to block illegal pornographic websites, helping to protect Illinois children and families. The benefits of the Internet are far too numerous and obvious to state in this paper. For public libraries, the Internet is perhaps the best research tool ever available. The Internet, however, is also responsible for the proliferation of adult and child pornography. Illegal material that used to be unavailable to average citizens and children is now largely unavoidable. Pornography is now readily accessible to anyone using unfiltered Internet computers, even children in many neighborhood libraries. This means that an 8 year-old could potentially access pornography and other illegal sites.

Sexual Predators – Young children are vulnerable. In a Philadelphia public library last year, a homeless man attacked, raped and beat an 8-year-old girl, after viewing pornography on the library's free Internet computers. Library staff claim that he was looking at porn in the library often. But this wasn't his first offense. This homeless man served time for attacking a 9-year-old girl, and was banned from a different public library branch because he exposed himself to a 16-year-old. He has been sentenced to 35-70 years in prison for his crime against this innocent young girl.

In June, Naperville police arrested a 34 year old man in the city library for allegedly fondling himself while viewing Internet porn. The man was charged with two misdemeanor counts each of sexual exploitation of a child and public indecency. He was reported by teenage boys who were also in the computer lab at the time of the incident. The same thing happened in Des Plaines, where police arrested an 18 year old in June for public indecency after a patron alleged that the young man was fondling himself while viewing Internet porn.

Child Exploitation – A study by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children said that approximately 20,000 images of child pornography are posted on the Web every week, and half of these images depict children between the ages of 9 and 12.

According to law enforcement officials, the Internet has become a useful tool for pedophiles who are able to use it to communicate with each other and trade images of children. Pedophiles also use the Internet to contact unsuspecting children in chat rooms, to befriend them and engage in sexually explicit conversations, and, ultimately, to lure them away from the safety of their homes for illicit and often fatal encounters. In so doing, pedophiles use pornography to lower the inhibitions of their victims and to persuade them that adult-child sexual interaction is perfectly acceptable.

Responsible Use of Tax Dollars – Public funds should never be used to distribute pornography. We would not allow our tax dollars to be used to put pornographic magazines on the shelves of our neighborhood libraries; why should we let our tax dollars be used for pornography online in libraries which are subsidized by taxpayers? Libraries cannot possibly provide all constitutionally protected materials to the public. There is a selection policy to determine appropriate material; this should be extended to content found on the Internet. Taxpayers should not be forced to provide access to illegal materials in libraries.

Unintentional Exposure - Internet pornographers use various techniques to trick both adults and children into viewing their pictures. One favorite trick is to send pornographic spam email. Another is to utilize misleading domain names or deceptive metatags (a piece of text hidden in the HTML code) which can mislead search engines into returning a pornographic web page in response to an innocent query. As a result of these deceptive metatags, searches using terms such as toys, Britney Spears, beanie babies, Snow White and Bambi can lead to pornographic websites. Once an unsuspecting person is on a pornographic website, Internet pornographers use other techniques such as *mousetrapping* (forcing the user to remain on a specific website by not allowing him to leave the site. Whenever the user tries to leave the site by closing the window, the site that is *mousetrapping* will automatically open new windows with similar content.)

Intentional Access – Curiosity in children and teenagers is natural and healthy, but if they seek out information about sexuality on the Internet, they will be confronted with negative, anti-social messages that can forever alter their views of sexuality and human relationships. Curious children can easily find pornography using search engines and words like “sex,” “hard-core,” and “pornography.” Once children have been exposed to graphic sexual content on the Web, their innocence can never be regained.

Degrades Human Dignity – Adult pornography victims are both male and female. Most of the images are of women, who are depicted as mere objects of male pleasure and domination. Pornography victims are demeaned and degraded as they are often beaten, tortured or raped. Some are forced into sexual situations with animals or are assaulted by multiple partners. The most vulnerable members of society, our children are targeted and exploited by pornographers who could care less about the physical, emotional and mental harm they inflict. The children pay the heaviest price for this type of “adult” liberty.

First Amendment – Nothing in the First Amendment requires any publicly funded institution to provide pornography. Libraries should not be in the business of distributing materials that are harmful to minors – which is already illegal. Filtering the Internet in public libraries isn’t about the First Amendment; it’s about protecting our children and the taxpayers!

The US Supreme Court has recognized the fact that government (which includes public libraries) has a “compelling interest” in protecting children from sexually explicit materials. In *Ginsburg v. New York*, the Supreme Court stated that “parents who have this primary responsibility for children’s well-being are entitled to the support of laws designed to aid discharge of that responsibility.” In addition, the Supreme Court has uniformly ruled that governmental regulations may also act to facilitate parental control over children’s access to sexually explicit material.

Pornography is not protected by the First Amendment, but in fact violates the human rights of every man and woman – but especially our children. Taxpayers **do not** want pornography in their neighborhood libraries.

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