

## **Crissy Kolarik**

### **HB497 Proponent Testimony**

My experience with online image abuse

I have learned the hard way that “revenge porn” or online image abuse can happen to anyone. It didn’t matter that I was over 40, it didn’t matter that I am a mom, or an educated professional. It didn’t matter that my images were intended for a trusted partner and not intended for public display. It didn’t matter. My private images were stolen and posted on anon-ib for everyone to see along with my name and location. There was no revenge involved in my case. An abusive violation of my privacy for the sick pleasure and entertainment of others.

The day my pictures were posted I was contacted by strangers on social media telling me what sexual actions they wished to perform on me. I have never been more fearful for my safety or the safety of my family. I had no idea how I could protect myself. I knew that they could easily find my whereabouts. I became physically sick and fought my tears. Later that day I was also contacted by a member of The BADASS ARMY (Battling against demeaning and abusive selfie sharing). This person let me know where to find the images that were shared, and I was able to see first hand how I was exposed without my consent and violated. Fortunately, she was able to guide me on how to fight back and get my images removed. It took 24 hours or so before they were taken down. While I waited I became obsessed with checking the site and read all the perverted comments of various posters and felt as if I was being mentally raped with each post. I experienced a relief briefly when the images with deleted but felt even more distraught when they reappeared less than 24 hours later followed by requested for more images.

I contacted law enforcement and they told me there was nothing they can do because it was online, and they didn’t have jurisdiction or any way of finding out who was my perpetrator. I basically had to wait until someone showed up at my door and physically violate me before I could get help. I was told that I “Shouldn’t have taken the pictures in the first place”. So instead of being afforded protection from abuse, I was blamed for it and I was shamed for it. So, I was the one held responsible for my own abuse.

I felt helpless. Being abused and not even knowing who this massive gang of abusers were or how to stop them. I shut down emotionally. I had significant anxiety attacks and suffered from a depressive episode. I realize now that I was experiencing a significant trauma because of this experience and still to this day, months later have effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

During this process I have discovered the fact there is a severe and pervasive problem that is not being addressed. Our legal system needs updated in reaction to a new wave of online crimes and abuses. There are literally thousands of sites where this abuse is happening, and the sites are not held responsible for their content and the offenses run rampant. The offenders hide behind the veil of anonymity and suffer no consequence to their actions. The websites profit from this abuse and do very little if anything to protect victims. The victims are of all different races, socio-economic backgrounds and ages, including children. We cannot let this abuse continue. I am a licensed mental health therapist and now have seen firsthand the traumatic impact on victims and the limited resources available. And worst of all the lack of consequences for the offenders. There is a crowd mentality with this crime and those involved will fight for the right to continue their victimization. It is obvious they have no moral or ethical standards to prevent their actions, and without consequence this abuse will continue to escalate. There needs to be education and awareness brought to this issue. Victims need to be heard and

potential offenders need to understand the damaging effects. But ultimately, there need to be laws in place. There needs to be real life consequences for offenders. This will be the first step in reducing the harm to victims and holding the offenders accountable for their actions.