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Written Testimony Regarding House Resolution 180

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and Members of the House Health Committee:

I am a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist and Certified Sex Therapist. For 39 years my career has focused on studying, counseling, teaching and writing about human sexuality. I've taught at Stanford Medical School, have lectured at dozens of other universities, and have given two Congressional briefings on evidence-based sex education.

I have testified previously in various federal and state courts as an expert in psychology and human sexuality, including arousal, desire, pornography, fantasy, and fetishes/paraphilias.

I am the award-winning author of seven books about human sexuality. My most recent scholarly book is *His Porn, Her Pain: Confronting America's PornPanic With Honest Talk About Sex*. In this book I discuss the Utah legislature's 2016 resolution identifying pornography as a public health hazard—virtually the same resolution under consideration in Ohio today.

There are three groups of problems with the Ohio resolution:

1. The Resolution contains multiple inaccuracies clearly contradicted by the available facts.

- The Resolution claims that pornography portrays children as sexual objects.

Federal law prohibits this, and the government has never convicted a commercial maker of adult pornography of violating this law. The makers of legal adult pornography simply do not manufacture illegal child pornography or portray underage children in their productions.

- The Resolution claims that pornography is primarily violent.

The overwhelming majority of pornography is not violent, for a simple reason: violence is not what the majority of pornography consumers desire. Some anti-porn activists are able to claim huge amounts of violence with cynical coding tricks—for example, by labelling all depictions of fellatio as “violence.”

Data for the content of pornography comes from a variety of independent sources. These include *A Billion Wicked Thoughts* by computational neuroscientists Ogas and Gaddam, which analyzed 500,000,000 internet searches for porn.

- The Resolution claims that pornography damages marriages

No one leaves a vibrant, intimate marriage in order to consume pornography. Most married porn users are in positive, satisfying marriages. Others are in unsatisfying marriages—caused by depression, anxiety, selfishness, poor communication, alcohol abuse, or conflicts about parenting, money, religion, in-laws, or sex. As documented by the Bible, the Greeks, the Quran, and Shakespeare, people have had marital problems for these non-porn reasons since ancient times.

To put it another way, there are no studies showing that those in marriages with a porn consumer are less satisfied than those in marriages without a porn consumer.

- The Resolution claims that there’s an increase in problematic sexual activity at younger ages, and an increased desire among adolescents to engage in risky sexual behavior.

The opposite is true. Young people are not increasingly engaging in risky sexual behavior. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the average age of first intercourse has gone up in the last 10 years; the rate of teen pregnancy has gone down in the last 10 years; and young people are more likely to use a condom during their first intercourse than they were 10 years ago.

- The Resolution claims that recent research indicates that pornography is potentially “biologically addictive.”

None of the hallmarks of true addiction are found with pornography use. These include the need for increased dosing over time (tolerance); a measurable change in the body’s response to the substance; and withdrawal symptoms when the substance is decreased or removed.

The concept of biological addiction to pornography has been rejected by professional groups including the American Medical Association; American Psychiatric Association; American Association for Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists; and the World Health Organization.

2. The Resolution assumes consequences of pornography use that are not documented.

- The Resolution claims that pornography leads to low self-esteem and body image disorders.

According to current research, these problems of youth are linked to a number of inputs, including popular music, TV, fashion, and video games. In particular, evidence is overwhelming (from the Child Mind Institute, Family Online Safety Institute, and others) that these problems are connected with internet use, smartphone use, and social media use.

- The Resolution claims that pornography increases the demand for sex trafficking.

There are three main sources of adult pornography: amateurs who upload images of themselves as an expression of their own sexuality; individual entrepreneurs who operate websites selling access to photos or real-time video of themselves responding to subscribers' requests; and commercial enterprises that employ people and pay taxes.

None of these involves sex trafficking or coercion.

While we may not approve of women choosing to participate in pornography, the fact is that each year, hundreds of thousands of amateurs and individual entrepreneurs do. And each year, the makers of commercial porn films turn away droves of women wanting to act in them. There is no need to traffic anyone into this profession, because the supply of eager participants is enormous.

- The Resolution claims pornography impacts brain development and functioning, contributing to emotional and medical illness.

There is no evidence that porn use contributes to medical illness, as masturbation has been proven to be medically harmless. A single Italian study has speculated that porn use increases the incidence of erectile dysfunction (ED), but no American study has corroborated this. There is no reason to believe that young men are now suffering from increased ED. However, the aggressive marketing of Viagra has led

more young men to want the drug for “insurance” (especially when they’ve been drinking), which gives the appearance that more of them have ED.

- The Resolution claims pornography leads men to postpone marriage

The age of first marriage has been steadily increasing for men and women in all countries with transitioning or post-industrial economies. This is because the length of education is increasing; young adults are launching later, and so are moving back in with their parents after completing school; young people are increasingly cohabiting without marriage; young people can have sex without marriage; women with economic independence are increasingly able to choose whom and when to marry; and people are postponing their first child.

Blaming pornography for these larger socio-economic and political forces is simplistic and inaccurate.

3. The Resolution uses the language of public health and public danger to present a moral agenda.

Up until the 1970s, the social condemnation of pornography (and the censorship of racy films and books) was made in the language of morality. Consuming such materials was described as bad for the user.

The last quarter of the 20th century saw the Sexual Revolution; women’s rights movement; legalization of contraception for single people; Roe v Wade; gay rights movement; more open medical discussions about masturbation; and a general decline in religiosity. There was no longer a consensus about “immorality,” and morality as a basis for public policy became harder to promote or defend.

Groups like Focus on the Family (founded in 1977), Concerned Women for America (founded in 1979), Family Research Council (1983), and Parents Television Council (1995) had to shift the explanation for their opposition to pornography and other sexually-oriented media. They kept their morality-based agenda, but re-packaged it as a concern for public health. At the close of the 20th century and continuing today, they promoted the existence of a Public Health Crisis regarding sexually oriented media.

The argument against pornography and sexually-oriented books and other media is no longer about how these are bad for the user alone. An individual’s porn use is now described as bad for the community: for the user’s family, for women, for children, for would-be victims of domestic violence and trafficking.

All without scientific data. Plenty of anecdote, plenty of outrage, but virtually no data. Certainly no cause-and-effect data. This alleged Public Health Menace is simply the re-branding of moral outrage. Porn used to be “immoral.” Now porn is “dangerous”—and this is the foundation of the proposed Resolution.

On the eve of his execution in 1989, convicted mass murderer Ted Bundy said that watching porn made him kill his many victims. James Dobson, executive director of Focus on the Family, proceeded to popularize this interview as “proof” of porn’s pernicious effects, and demanded government action. Ridiculously, the views of a deranged psychopath are *still* being quoted as insight about public policy.

According to the FBI, the rate of sexual violence in the U.S. has declined in the last ten years. We know more about its incidence now (which is good), but its rate, thankfully, continues to decline. Those who propose a Resolution claiming that pornography is a public health danger ignore facts like these, preferring to frighten the public instead. This is not the way to protect the people of Ohio.

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There is one thing of great value in this Resolution, which sexuality professionals have been urging for years. Pornography has become an important source of sex education for young people—precisely because parents and schools are not providing them the information and perspectives they need.

This is not the fault of pornography. It does not claim to be educational, nor even factual—it is fiction, created for entertainment. Since the Ohio legislature is so concerned about young people being insufficiently informed about sexuality and good sexual decision-making, all sexuality professionals support the legislature in requiring medically-accurate school sex education that covers the subjects that students need to make healthy choices. The legislature could also arrange classes for parents to learn how to discuss sexuality with their children.

Sincerely,

Marty Klein, Ph.D

Dr. Marty Klein, Ph.D