

Chairwoman Cindy Abrams, Vice Chairman Josh Williams, Ranking Member Richard Brown, and Members of the Ohio Criminal Justice Committee,

My name is Aidan Gregory. I am here today in support of house bill 295 and this support is born out of a deeply personal journey, one that has led me from the depths of despair to a place of hope. At the age of 11, I, like so many of our youth today, was unwittingly exposed to online adult content. This early encounter set me on a path that would challenge my mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and is a testament to the profound and often underestimated impact that such material can have on young, developing minds.

The struggle I faced was not just against the addictive nature of this content I encountered but also against the isolation, shame, and confusion that it had bred. These feelings were magnified by the silence that surrounds the issue, both mine and the broader societal reluctance to address this critical challenge head-on. My adolescence was marked by this silent battle, and so have many others in this generation.

It wasn't until I reached the age of 16 that a significant turning point came about in my life. It was then that I had accepted God, finding in my faith a new lens through which to view myself and the world around me. My faith journey was transformative, providing me not only with a sense of community and belonging but also with a framework for understanding my worth and purpose beyond the struggles I had faced. This religious awakening was instrumental in my recovery, offering me a path out of the cycle of addiction and despair.

However, my story is just one among countless others, many of which do not find such a turning point. This is why I stand before you today, advocating for the implementation of age restrictions on online adult websites included in HB 295. Through my experience, I hope to illustrate not just the potential for harm inherent in unrestricted access to such content, but also the broader implications it holds for mental and emotional wellbeing of our state's youth.

The journey from exposure to recovery is challenging. For me, it involved not just the internal battle against addiction but also the struggle to reconcile my experiences with the silence that

often surrounds this issue. The support I found in my faith community was pivotal, yet it also highlighted the importance of external safeguards and interventions. Age restrictions on online adult content represent a crucial form of such intervention, a proactive step toward protecting young individuals from the risks of early exposure.

The argument for implementing these restrictions is grounded in recognizing the inherent vulnerability of our youth and the responsibility we hold to protect them. In an age where digital access opens doors to vast resources and opportunities, it also exposes our children to risks that they are not equipped to navigate.

The call for age restrictions is, at its heart, a call for preventative measures. It is about acknowledging the complex web of factors that contribute to mental health issues among our youth and taking tangible steps to address one of the sources of these challenges. By limiting youth access to adult content, we can help mitigate the risk of early exposure, which can lead to addiction, distorted perceptions of self and others, and profound emotional and psychological distress.

As I reflect on my own journey, from the brink of despair to a place of hope and purpose, I am reminded of the critical role that external interventions can play in altering the course of a young person's life. My faith was a beacon in my darkest times, but not all children will find their way to such a beacon on their own. It is incumbent upon us to erect safeguards that protect them from the dangers of premature exposure to adult content which HB 295 will do.

In closing, I urge you to consider the implementation of age restrictions on online adult websites included in HB 295 as a necessary step in protecting our youth. Let us take action to prevent other young individuals from embarking on the same journey I did. By doing so, we affirm our commitment to the well-being and healthy development of our children, ensuring they have the opportunity to grow and thrive in a safe and supportive environment.

Thank you for your time, your compassion, and your willingness to engage with this crucial issue.

