

Capitol Hill briefing assesses far-reaching consequences of pornography

WASHINGTON - Opponents of pornography came together in Washington recently for a briefing that explored the increasing consequences of illegal pornography in today's world.

The briefing, "Pornography Harms: What Congress Can Do to Enforce Existing Laws," was led by Patrick Trueman, a former chief of the U.S. Justice Department's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and a parishioner at St. Mark Church in Vienna, Va.

Trueman's website, <http://pornharms.com>, launched earlier this year as a database of online articles and essays on the harmful effects of pornography.

The briefing was attended by nearly 90 people, including members of Congress and their staffs. Trueman was one of seven speakers at the event, which included anti-pornography experts from the academic and psychological fields and a former pornography performer.

The purpose of the June 15 briefing was to educate members of Congress about the real-life consequences of pornography and encourage them to fight for stronger enforcement of existing obscenity laws.

During his presentation, Trueman spoke about an argument used by some that fighting pornography limits the adult entertainment industry's constitutional right of free speech.

He referred to the 1973 case of *Miller v. California*, in which the Supreme Court said, “To equate the free and robust exchange of ideas and political debate with commercial exploitation of obscene material demeans the grand conception of the First Amendment and its high purposes in the historic struggle for freedom. It is (as defined in a prior case) a ‘misuse of the great guarantees of free speech and free press.’”

“The court has never said that obscene pornography is protected speech. It is not, and it is very harmful,” Trueman said.

Donna Rice Hughes, president of Enough is Enough, a nonprofit organization dedicated to making the Internet safer for children and families, gave examples of how easy it is for children to be exposed to pornography online, accidentally or intentionally. She cited statistics that seven in 10 children have accidentally accessed pornography, and one in three youths who viewed pornography viewed it intentionally.

“Pornography is not just harmless fun and it is not a victimless crime,” Hughes said. “We cannot undo the extensive damage that is already done, but we can continue doing what we have been doing all along, which is to cry out, ‘Enough is enough!’

“Today we are calling on Congress and the Department of Justice to ensure that the aggressive prosecution of our current obscenity laws is a priority. Our children’s innocence is worth fighting for,” she said.

It’s not only children who are in danger of being harmed by pornography, according to speaker Mary Anne Layden, director of the sexual trauma and psychopathology program at the University of Pennsylvania. She spoke about pornography addiction and how it can cost men relationships, self-esteem and, in some cases, job opportunities.

“Pornography robs men of their masculinity, of their psychological health, of their self-respect, of their greatness,” Layden said. “Pornography robs men of themselves. It robs them of the chance to be the kind of men they know they can be and it then robs their family, their community and their country of all that they could have offered.”

Former pornography performer Shelley Lubben spoke about the working conditions within the adult entertainment industry, sharing statistics and personal stories about sexually transmitted diseases, verbal and physical abuse, and rampant use of drugs and alcohol.

In reference to her own experiences of being abused and humiliated on the set, Lubben said, “I basically checked out and died.”

Since leaving the pornography industry, Lubben has been treated for cervical cancer, caused by the human papillomavirus she caught while working as a performer. She is now married, has three daughters and works as director of the Pink Cross Foundation, an organization she founded that helps adult pornography workers find emotional and financial support as they transition out of the industry.

“The truth is porn is not glamorous. Porn destroys human lives and is destroying our nation, but we can change,” Lubben said. “There’s hope. We can heal, and I’m living proof of that. I urge you to enforce current obscenity laws and protect human lives. The children need you, the young women and men need you, and, honestly, I need you. I can’t fight this industry by myself.”

Much of the pornography in society today, including what is available on the Internet and pay-per-view channels is actually illegal under the country’s obscenity laws, Trueman said. The problem comes because the laws are not always enforced.

“Congress needs to ensure that the laws it has passed on obscenity are enforced by

the Department of Justice,” he said.