



**Statement of Love146
For the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
September 19, 2017**

Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to present this written statement on behalf of our organization and the many children we work with.

Love146 is an international anti-trafficking organization, headquartered in New Haven, CT, with survivor care and prevention education programs in the United States, the United Kingdom and the Philippines. As an organization that has spent 15 years working exclusively on the issue of child trafficking and exploitation, we have seen first-hand the increasing role that the Internet is playing in abetting child sex traffickers. Many of the children in our care today, from the Philippines to the United States, have been bought and sold through various internet platforms.

When platforms, such as Backpage.com *knowingly* advertise children — as if they are commodities — they are facilitating the exploitation and rape of our children. We have worked with many children whose traffickers have required them to pose for photos — images that would in many cases be considered child pornography — so that they could be bought and sold online. Sometimes these children were unaware that the photos they were taking were later going to be used to advertise their bodies for sale — sometimes these children thought they were exchanging photos with a romantic partner, sometimes they believed they were involved in a modeling project. In other cases, children were required to take “selfies” and coached through the process, how to look, what to wear, what parts of their bodies to display. If their initial photos did not elicit enough interest from “buyers” responding to their “advertisement” they were required to take more explicit photos.

Being bought and sold online, next to classifieds for used clothes, bikes, appliances, and cars can have a devastating impact on how these children perceive themselves and can forever change how they view their relationship with their body. Their bodies now hold a specific and public price tag. In addition to the rapes and the horrific sexual acts, we have now created a situation in which we have placed a monetary value on our children. This commodification tells them, *this is what you are worth*. It is completely contrary to the message we want to send to children: that they are precious, that they are invaluable, that they are our future.

The fact that sex with children can be openly advertised is something that we would expect no human being to find acceptable. The courts have been clear: there needs to be a legislative

solution to the protections afforded to websites like Backpage.com through the original construction of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. In 2016, in the State of California v. Carl Ferrer et al, the court so clearly articulated this stating, “the Court understands the importance and urgency in waging war against sexual exploitation. Regardless of the grave potential for harm that may result in the exercise of this article of faith, Congress has precluded liability for online publishers for the action of publishing third party speech and thus provided for both a foreclosure from prosecution and an affirmative defense at trial. Congress has spoken on this matter and it is for Congress, not this Court, to revisit.”

This is exactly what S.1693, The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act of 2017, is attempting to rectify. Since the early days of the Internet, Congress has found appropriate and effective means to limit copyright and privacy infringement on the Internet. S.1693 is narrowly focused, targeting only those digital publishers who “knowingly” allow offending material to be published. Only those who “knowingly” allow children to be bought and sold on their website can be found liable for this content. If passed, S.1693 has the potential to greatly reduce the use of the Internet as a marketplace for the buying and selling of children. It will be a powerful tool with which organizations like ours, and law enforcement, will be able to help protect our children from exploiters and predators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you and the Committee with our perspective on this important piece of legislation. We look forward to continuing to work with you, the Committee and other Members of Congress on ways to safeguard children from child trafficking and exploitation.