

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 9, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear General Barr,

The foremost duty of the Department of Justice is to ensure the safety of the American people, especially the most vulnerable among us. In that vein, I write to you today regarding the exploitation of human trafficking victims in pornography streamed over the internet. Action must be taken.

Pornhub is a website dedicated to the sharing and streaming of pornographic videos on the internet. The website, owned by the Luxembourg-registered, Canadian-headquartered firm MindGeek Holding SARL, currently ranks as the thirty-fourth most popular website visited in United States.¹ As the website itself boasts:

In 2019 there were over 42 Billion visits to Pornhub, which means there was an average of 115 million visits per day. One-Hundred-Fifteen Million – that's the equivalent of the populations of Canada, Australia, Poland and the Netherlands all visiting in one day!²

Pornhub's incredible reach has a much darker side than the image of harmless fun that it tries to project. In several notable incidents over the past year, Pornhub made content available worldwide showing women and girls that were victims of trafficking being raped and exploited. In October, police in Florida arrested a man trafficking a fifteen-year-old girl, missing from her family for nearly a year, who had been subjected to horrific abuse that included repeated rape and a forced abortion.³ In the course of his abuse, her trafficker uploaded more than sixty videos depicting her sexual exploitation to websites including Pornhub.⁴ In another instance, your Department charged the two owners and two other employees of a popular pornographic film production company with a variety of sex trafficking offenses for employing a disturbing array of deceptive and coercive means to force women to make pornography that they later uploaded

¹ *Top Sites in United States*, ALEXA, <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/US>.

² *The 2019 Year in Review*, PORNHUB: INSIGHTS (Dec. 11, 2019), <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>.

³ Tonya Alanez, *58 porno videos of 15-year-old girl lead to Davie man's arrest*, S. FLA. SUN-SENTINEL (Oct. 23, 2019), <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/davie/fl-ne-davie-man-arrest-teen-porn-20191023-cpv5yq7dmjh7dd4cuunuqq7wmi-story.html>.

⁴ *Id.*

to Pornhub against their will.⁵ Indeed, the problem of Pornhub streaming content featuring women and children victims of sex trafficking reached the point in November that PayPal cut off services for Pornhub, refusing to facilitate this abuse any longer.⁶

Pornhub streams a massive amount of content, as the website itself trumpets:

[T]here were over 39 billion searches performed, which is 8.7 billion more searches than last year. . . . In 2019 there was a record amount of video uploads, over 6.83 million new videos were uploaded to Pornhub. To put this in perspective – if you strung all of 2019’s new video content together and started watching them way back in 1850, you’d still be watching them today! In 2019, Pornhub transferred 6597 petabytes of data, which was about 18,073 terabytes per day, and 209 gigabytes per second! To put this in perspective, if you copied all of 2019’s transferred data onto hard drives and stacked them, they would reach 100km high to the edge of space. . . . Every minute on Pornhub in 2019 [t]here were 80,032 visits, 77,861 searches, and 219,985 video views. Every minute, there was an average of 2.8 hours of content uploaded to Pornhub – that means that every 9 minutes or so, an entire days’ worth of video was uploaded to Pornhub.⁷

In light of this data, these publicized cases clearly represent just the tip of the iceberg of women and children being exploited in videos on Pornhub. I applaud the actions that the Department has already undertaken under your leadership on this issue, but Pornhub must not escape scrutiny. I therefore request that the Department open an investigation into Pornhub and its parent entity MindGeek Holding SARL for their involvement in this disturbing pipeline of exploiting children and other victims and survivors of sex trafficking.

Sincerely,



Ben Sasse
U.S. Senator
Chairman, U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee
on Oversight, Agency Action, Federal Rights and Federal
Courts

⁵ Press Release, U.S. Dep’t of Justice, *GirlsDoPorn Owners and Employees Charged in Sex Trafficking Conspiracy* (Oct. 10, 2019), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/girlsdoporn-owners-and-employees-charged-sex-trafficking-conspiracy>.

⁶ Shanti Das, *PayPal cuts off porn site that ran child abuse videos*, *TIMES* (London, Nov. 17, 2019), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/paypal-cuts-off-porn-site-that-ran-child-abuse-videos-98j2bdnjt>.

⁷ *The 2019 Year in Review*, *supra* note 2.