

For Immediate Release

May 11, 2010

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Sen. Wyden Introduces the Invest in Child Safety Act, A First Step in Focusing on Harm, not Platforms

On May 6, 2020, Sen. Wyden introduced the [Invest in Child Safety Act](#), an attempt to address child sexual abuse by focusing on the abuse enacted, and not the mechanisms used. We commend the investment in prevention and outreach, and mental health support for those who are tasked with confronting these harms, but we caution against the expansion of carceral systems. While this is a step in the right direction, we want to push everyone one step further, and invest not in police but in communities, not in prosecution but in prevention.

We reject the premise that child sexual abuse is inevitable. When we focus exclusively on prosecution and investigation, we divest from prevention and invest in the assumption that violence is an inherent part of our society. Decades of divestment from communities and familial support, paired with prioritizing a carceral approach to interventions on gendered violence and the further criminalization and isolation of the most marginalized, have contributed to conditions that increase vulnerability to child sexual abuse.

Many sex workers come to this issue as people who have experienced different forms of harm and violence, including child sexual abuse. **Our identities as sex workers and survivors of violence are not in conflict**, and neither are the solutions that we propose for building safety. It is our due diligence to prioritize the prevention of violence -- through education and resources -- and for our focus **and our funding** to reflect that priority.

We support affirmative policy solutions to prevent abuse and support survivors of harm including:

- **Provide [comprehensive sex education](#) with a focus on consent and autonomy.** Abstinence-only education continues to be federally funded despite its consistently negative outcomes as well as calls from youth advocates and educators to stop such funding. Inadequate sex education has led to increased rates of teen pregnancy, STI and HIV transmission, and a pervasive fear and stigma around sex that promotes non-disclosure and shame.
- **Expand non-carceral, community-based options, emphasizing non-involvement with the child welfare system, and centering [transformative justice](#).** Changing the conditions which create violence and harm is one of the most powerful and least attempted forms of justice. Transforming conditions means preventing child abuse, and investing in community programs that prioritize this transformation must come before

investing in policing. Our responses to child sexual abuse must center the needs of communities and families, *not the criminal legal system*.

- **End mandatory reporting or expand non-mandatory reporting options for young people to access support.** When young people's words trigger forcible intervention, those young people are put in a cruel catch-22 while losing even more control over a situation in which they have been victimized. Young people are often thoughtful about their decisions and have well-founded reasons for not wanting to involve law enforcement or other state actors. Sometimes, they simply want support and to stop the harm. We must allow young people to decide how to involve outside actors. By doing so, we can honor their needs, deepen their understanding of consent, and allow them to be more in control of their lives and healing, not less.
- **Provide economic and social investment in communities and families.** Economic and social instability increase child abuse and familial violence. [Financial stability of families and caregivers](#) is an investment in preventing family violence, including intimate partner violence. We need more housing, not more police.
- **Implement comprehensive healthcare for all, including parity in mental health care options.** Survivors of harm should not have to disclose anything to access healthcare. Mental health support should be available to everyone, including survivors of harm who never tell another person beyond their medical provider and wish to keep it that way.
- **Re-authorize and fully fund The Family Violence Prevention Act (HR 5401)** This important source of funding is currently left un-authorized, and remains at levels woefully inadequate to fulfill FVPSA's important functions of preventing and responding to family violence and child abuse.

We appreciate Senator Wyden for putting forward legislation aimed at countering child sexual abuse while not undermining the tools and mechanisms which some of those very same survivors use to stay safe. Youth who experience child sexual abuse and all people who are trafficked deserve full, rigorous support, not to be used as political footballs to advance anti-encryption and anti-sex agendas. We hope that this bill and our response serves as a catalyst for a broader discussion of child sexual abuse prevention, support for survivors, and the widespread impact of interventions.

Hacking//Hustling is a collective of sex workers and allies working at the intersection of technology and social justice formed in response to SESTA-FOSTA (The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act and Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act). Coming from backgrounds of public health, data science, community organizing, technology, law, and social justice, our team of researchers work to create partnerships and shift power to the people who are most impacted by poorly designed technology. Hacking//Hustling was formed with the belief that sex workers and survivors of violence are the experts of their own experience and an internet that is safe for sex workers is an internet that is safe for almost everyone.

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