



February 12, 2015

TO: Rep. Maxine Grad, Chair
Rep. William Jewett, Vice-Chair
House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy
RE: H.105 - which creates criminal sanctions and civil remedies for the display or disclosure of sexually explicit images without the subject's knowledge and consent

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about H. 105.

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence supports the creation of a law prohibiting the distribution of sexually explicit images without the subject's consent. Non-consensual distribution is an increasingly common tactic used by domestic abusers to maintain power and control over their victims. In numerous cases, abusers threaten to disclose intimate images of their partners when victims attempt to leave the relationship. Abusers also use the threat of disclosure to keep their partners under their control, only to make good on the threat once their partners find the courage to leave.

In fact, recent research completed by University of Maryland and the End Revenge Porn Project found that one-in-ten former intimate partners have threatened to expose their ex by sharing intimate images of their ex online; 60% follow through with their threat. Of that 60%, the vast majority do more than just share the intimate images: they also share full names, emails, phone numbers, and home and workplace addresses.ⁱ Such tactics endanger, degrade, and humiliate victims. It guarantees reputational harm and has destroyed victims' ability to maintain or seek employment. This same research further indicates an increased safety risk for many of the women victims: 49% reported they were harassed or stalked by people who saw the revenge porn post containing their personal information.ⁱⁱ

The effect of such devastating violation takes its toll on a victim. According to a study conducted by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, over 80% of revenge porn victims experience severe emotional distress and anxiety.ⁱⁱⁱ Shame, embarrassment, and the destruction of one's reputation, resources, sense of safety and privacy can be overwhelming. Take as an example 18 year-old Jessica Logan from Ohio, whose ex-boyfriend forwarded explicit photos of her after they broke up. Unable to withstand the barrage of taunts, Jesse took her own life. Sadly, Jesse's story is all too common. Too many well-known tragedies can be linked to such abuse and bullying. And yet there are those stories we never hear about – the ones that may not end in tragedy, but linger in the lives of victims who are left to deal with the overwhelming aftermath of such a violation.

For these reasons, the Vermont Network supports a bill that creates criminal sanctions and civil remedies for the display or disclosure of sexually explicit images without the subject's knowledge and consent.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

~Auburn

ⁱ Natalie Webb, Revenge Porn by the Numbers, End Revenge Porn, <http://www.endrevengeporn.org/revenge-porninfographic/> (last visited May 8, 2014.); Lover's Beware: Scorned Exes May Share Intimate Data and Images Online, McAfee: An Intel Company, <http://www.mcafee.com/us/about/news/2013/q1/20130204-01.aspx> (last visited Apr. 11, 2014.).

ⁱⁱ Natalie Webb, Revenge Porn by the Numbers, End Revenge Porn, <http://www.endrevengeporn.org/revenge-porn-infographic/> (last visited May 8, 2014.).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.