

Written Testimony

I stand in front of you today during a time that could and will go down as a pivotal moment in fighting to protect our youth online.

I was a freshman in high school in **2014** when I was approached online by a predator. He used the platform Facebook at first to contact me and hid behind an account name "Closed Turn". I remember that night; I was at TGI Fridays having dinner with my family. On the car ride home is when I opened the messages; he had stated that I had to get in contact with him immediately, that it was very important. At first, I ignored the messages, but he would only send more. I replied to the message asking who this was, and responded back that he had "something against me that I didn't want anyone to see," he stated that he could not tell me what it was or "who he had gotten it from." He told me that I couldn't tell anyone.

He tricked me, making me believe that he already had compromising photos of me. In my teenage brain, I panicked and thought I had no choice but to comply with his orders. So I did what I was told. And this began the torment I endured.

Despite his warnings not to tell anyone, I immediately disclosed to my school resource officer as soon as I got to school. He told me that there was nothing he could do for me, and to just ignore it and it would go away. He said he couldn't help me in any way, even making me feel ashamed. He had no resources, he knew no one that could help. After that, I thought there was nothing anyone could do, especially because my SRO was a detective for my local Sheriff's department, and if he is telling me there is no one to help me then it must be true.

After suffering for two years, I finally decided to take my voice back and share that I was being abused.

The offender made good on his promises and took to Facebook to exploit me. He rapidly posted the hundreds of images and videos he had of me, making public pages and user accounts for more leverage. They were posted for the world to see. At that point my family and I knew that we had to try to get law enforcement involved.

We called 911 and explained what was happening as my offender continued posting content online. When an officer got to my house, we explained the situation. I remember him saying to me "look, I'm just a road deputy, I don't know much about this stuff..." And at this point I had lost any hope that there was help, I lost all hope that anyone believed me, but after a moment he said "but I do know someone who may be able to help..." not much longer after the phone call there was a knock at my front door, a detective who worked cybersecurity for the same department my school resource officer was from.

As the detective and I sat in my kitchen and I shared my experience with him, he was on the phone with personnel from Facebook, attempting to get the content removed. We were told that

the profiles, public pages, and content would not be taken down as it did not violate their guidelines. Guidelines most companies still do not have in place. That was **April of 2016**.

It took time, but as we built connections within these platforms, we were able to get the content down within a few hours of the original post, versus it taking a day or longer to be taken off of the platform. You have to understand; every minute, every second is filled with fear and anxiety for victims.

I consider myself lucky. Lucky that in the end I found a law enforcement agent who listened to me, who believed me. Lucky that my local state attorney offered a helping hand and together they set me up immediately with a trauma therapist. Lucky that they didn't give up, and it's because of their hard work I get to stand in front of you today. I have connected with other survivors throughout the years, and I can tell you, my experience is rare. Not every victim has the same positive outcomes that I did.

It took time from when I disclosed in April of 2016 to getting to sentencing for my offender. He was eventually tracked down (as he masked his IP address) and arrested **August 3rd of 2017**. From **2017-2021** was a back and forth of whether or not there would be a trial or maybe we would get lucky and he would plead guilty.

Finally, he plead guilty. **March 12, 2021** is the day he was sentenced to 75 years in federal prison with no chance of parole. At the time of sentencing, he had **375 total victims**.

The unique, unconsidered aspect of this crime is that we are trafficked right from our homes, our schools, our communities. Anywhere our cellphone goes, we can be trafficked. For these children, it feels like there is no escape, no end.

While I no longer have content circulating the public web or public platforms, my images could continue being traded on the dark web, and what happens if they are posted publicly again?

The Stop CSAM Act that is currently being considered will help ensure the safety of our children online and hold big tech accountable in reporting and protecting them while they use their platforms. The victim protections outlined in this bill will help others have a more positive experience with the criminal justice system overall. This bill could help give victims and survivors the opportunity to take back their lives and protect them from further victimization.

Throughout my experience, I learned that this happened to me, but it doesn't define me. Please help us continue the fight to protect our children.

Thank you,

Taylor Sines

Survivor Advocate