

Testimony:

On October 20th, 2023, a deeply troubling incident occurred involving my daughter, her classmates, and the Westfield High School (WHS) administration. It was confirmed that my daughter was one of several victims involved in the creation and distribution of AI Deep Fake Nudes by her classmates. This event left her feeling helpless and powerless, intensified by the lack of accountability for the boys involved and the absence of protective laws, AI school policies, or even adherence to the school's own code of conduct and cyber harassment policies.

Since that day, my daughter and I have been tirelessly advocating for the establishment of AI laws, the implementation of AI school policies, and the promotion of education regarding AI. Despite being told repeatedly that nothing could be done, we find ourselves addressing this esteemed committee, highlighting the urgency and significance of this issue. Our advocacy has connected us with individuals from across the globe, including Texas, DC, Wisconsin, Australia, London, Japan, Germany, Greece, Spain, Paris, and more, facing similar school incidents, indicating a widespread and pressing global concern.

We have identified several loopholes in the handling of AI-related incidents that demand attention from government bodies, educational institutions, and the media. However, our greatest disappointment lies in the school's handling of the situation, which we believe is indicative of a broader issue across all schools, given the ease and allure of creating AI-generated content. Here, I wish to outline the mishandling of the situation by WHS:

1. The school inappropriately announced the names of the female AI victims over the intercom, compromising their privacy.
2. The boys responsible for creating the nude photos were discreetly removed from class, their identities protected.
3. When my daughter sought the support of a counselor during a meeting with the vice principal who was questioning her, her request was denied.
4. The administration claimed the AI photographs were deleted without having seen them, offering no proof of their deletion.
5. My attempts to communicate with the administration about the case have been consistently ignored.
6. A Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) report submitted in November 2023 has yet to yield a conclusive outcome, which we should receive within 10 days of submission.
7. The interviews carried out at the school with underage suspects in the presence of police but without their parents have made their statements inadmissible in court.
8. Despite our submission of updated policies (created by our lawyers at McCarter and English) to the Westfield Board of Education, the school's cyber harassment policies remain outdated, referencing Walkmans and pagers with no mention of AI to this day.

9. The school's communications have focused on only one boy involved, ignoring others.
10. The accountability imposed for creating the AI Deep Fake nudes without girl's consent was a mere one-day suspension for only one boy.

This incident and the school's response underscore the urgent need for updated policies and a more responsible approach to handling AI-generated content and cyber harassment at schools.

In light of the recent incident at Beverly Hills Middle School from this month, Superintendent Berge not only released a statement that the school's investigation is near completion (one week after the incident) but also took the crucial step of contacting Congress to emphasize the urgency of prioritizing the safety of children in the U.S. This proactive stance demonstrates a commendable commitment to facing uncomfortable truths head-on, with a focus on educating and advocating for essential changes in how such incidents are handled.

In contrast, my expectations for similar leadership and responsiveness from the principal at Westfield High School (WHS, MS. Asfendis) have been met with disappointment. Given that the principal, like myself, is both a mother and an educator, I had hoped for a stronger stance in defending and supporting the girls at WHS. Instead, there appears to be an effort to minimize the issue, hoping it will simply fade away. This approach is not only disheartening but also dangerous, as it fosters an environment where female students are left to feel victimized while male students escape necessary accountability. The discrepancy in handling such serious issues between schools like Beverly Hills Middle School and WHS is alarming and calls for immediate reevaluation and action to ensure all students are protected and supported equally in all of US schools.

Below please find other important factors that should be look into and addressed by this esteemed committee:

1. Immediate legislative action at both state and federal levels is urgently required to address the growing challenges presented by AI-generated content. Those legislations should hold all involved parties accountable under both criminal and civil law if the technology is misused, and a separate one ensuring clear labeling of AI-generated materials for clarity.
2. Given the prolonged process required for new legislation to pass, it's imperative that we take immediate action to update school cyber harassment policies and codes of conduct as well as start the conversation on updating our curriculum across US, to better address technology-facilitated violence, including concerns related to AI deepfakes that fall under that same umbrella, along with cyberflashing, sextortion, cyberstalking, etc. Here's the link to the comprehensive report that highlights the deficiencies in the current curriculum across Canadian jurisdictions and offers recommendations for future directions that should also be studied by our government https://1332d589-88d9-46fd-b342-d3eba2ef6889.usrfiles.com/ugd/1332d5_40b7850d228a4cob9e7ed54737fcb30b.pdf. This urgent update is crucial to safeguard students from future incidents, ensuring their protection in the interim period before legislative measures can be fully implemented.
3. I also wish to share my perspective on the urgent need for reforming the Title of Section 230, especially in light of rapidly evolving technologies and the intricate challenges posed by AI. The analogy of traditional versus self-driving vehicles aptly illustrates the

necessity for our legal frameworks to adapt to technological advancements. In the same vein, it's imperative that Section 230 evolves to reflect the realities of our time, ensuring it remains relevant and effective.

4. Let's remember, AI is not all bad. It is a fascinating technology that is constantly advancing our society. That is why it is critically important to begin educating students across America about the possibilities offered by AI technology. Without such education, we risk fostering a generation largely unprepared for the future, with only a small percentage possessing the skills needed to effectively utilize this technology. Ensuring comprehensive AI education now is essential to avoid creating a social divide between those who can harness AI and those left behind, thus preparing all students for a technologically advanced and inclusive future.
5. Consent. It is imperative to start shifting the narrative and ask the meaningful questions that drive change. In addition to focusing on how are the girls feeling, let's shine the light on the social and emotional repercussions of not having to face accountability by the boys for their actions – a side often overlooked in these discussions. While understanding the impact on the girls is essential, it's equally important to explore the social and emotional consequences for boys when they are not held accountable for their actions. This angle is often overlooked, yet it plays a pivotal role in the narrative on consent, that we are still struggling with in 2024.
6. Lastly, it is imperative to shift focus from assigning blame to finding solutions regarding the spread of harmful content online. A pragmatic first step involves organizing a roundtable discussion with key platform hosts, such as Microsoft, Google, Apple, and Amazon. These entities, intentionally or not hosting harmful content, are uniquely positioned in the private sector to enact immediate, impactful changes due to their expertise and resources. They should be motivated to implement positive changes and protections, not out of obligation, but because it is the socially and ethically right course of action. This collaborative effort could significantly enhance online safety and integrity, setting a precedent for responsible digital engagement.
7. Similar to digital content platforms, financial institutions such as AMEX, PayPal, Chase, and Visa play a pivotal role in the digital ecosystem, particularly in facilitating transactions. These entities must also be held accountable and engage in proactive measures to prevent their platforms from being used for harmful activities. Organizing discussions and collaborations with these financial giants is essential to create a secure and ethical transactional environment. By implementing stringent oversight and protective measures, these financial platforms can significantly reduce the risk of facilitating harmful transactions, showcasing their commitment to social responsibility and ethical business practices.

It's time for us to assume responsibility for our collective lack of self-education on AI, recognizing that AI is not a new phenomenon. It has been in development since the 1940s, with dedicated research beginning in 1956 at Dartmouth College, and saw a significant milestone with the first GPT release in 2020. The focus should shift from merely discussing the implementation of precautions to actively striving to catch up with this rapidly evolving and complex technology. This responsibility is not just on government agencies but extends to educational platforms and news organizations as well. It's crucial to move beyond sensationalizing AI and start prioritizing education about its capabilities and limitations, ensuring a well-informed public that can navigate the AI landscape knowledgeably and ethically.

I hope this message hasn't taken up too much of your time. My concern is always whether I've managed to convey all the critical facts and points that Francesca, and I are advocating for. Thank you for considering our perspectives.

Dorota Mani