



All around us

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

Protect young eyes on capitol hill

Chairman Graham, Senator Blumenthal, and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing all of us to speak today. I cannot think of a more noble cause for all of us to be spending our time on today than the safety and protection of our children. I began Protect Young Eyes five years ago because the internet is complex and even diligent parents are overwhelmed by the digital choices their children are facing. Through thousands of hours of research, hundreds of presentations at schools around the country, and dozens of articles examining digital trends, we have witnessed both the wonderful potential and the troubling and pervasive darkness that exists in the pockets of millions of young people today. I'm certain that in the course of today's discussion, we will hear difficult stories. I wish they were uncommon.¹

The above is the opening statement of Mr. Chris

McKenna before the Senate Judiciary Committee on July 9, 2019. Though not a highly publicized event that took place at our nation's capitol, it is nevertheless one worthy of our attention and examination. McKenna is the founder of Protect Young Eyes, an organization that provides resources for parents and leaders to create safe digital environments for children and youth. The opportunity to appear before United States senators at a hearing entitled "Protecting Innocence in a Digital World" arose out of Protect Young Eyes' involvement in a campaign called #fixappratings. Apps for purchase and download on phones and tablets include age-appropriate ratings that are assigned by the app-makers themselves. Currently, however, there is no accountability for the technology companies to ensure that the ratings are accurate, the result of which is that users may be deceived about the potential danger found in the apps. In order to address this issue along with, more generally, the protection of children on the Internet, McKenna

¹ <https://protectyouneyes.com/my-statement-to-the-senate-judiciary-committee-protecting-innocence-in-a-digital-world>.

with four other experts in this field, were given opportunity to interact with U.S. senators at the aforementioned hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

McKenna's testimony is sobering. In it he specifically addressed Snapchat and Instagram, by far two of the most widely used apps among youth, both in the world and in the church. Concerning Instagram, Mr. McKenna said,

A recent poll of 2,000 teens found that nearly 75% of them had received pornographic direct messages from strangers, even if they had a private account. But you won't find any warnings in the app store descriptions for Instagram that mention anything about sexual predators, direct message risks, sex trafficking, or hardcore pornography. Instagram's defaults are not set for child safety or data privacy even though Instagram is rated 12+ by Apple and 13+ by Google.

Regarding Snapchat, McKenna commented, "Snapchat is where explicit content on Pornhub lives just seconds away from every user through backdoors within the app. The app knowingly allows a well-documented list of porn performers to make thousands of dollars daily through their premium Snap account." And later, "But again, you won't find anything in Snapchat's app store descriptions that warn parents about premium Snapchat accounts, predator risks of using Snap Maps, or the hyper-sexualized content in Discover news. Snapchat is rated 12+ by Apple and 13+ by Google."

In light of the above, I offer the following three considerations. First, we are reminded as Christians that the standard that governs our use of apps and social media is the infallible Word of God. McKenna's calling attention to this issue is noteworthy and helpful. However, we readily recognize the limitations of app ratings, though in certain instances we may consult them as a helpful guide. Whether this campaign produces any changes in the app rating system or not, the responsibility that falls upon all believers, especially Christian parents, remains the same, namely, to base the use or non-use of digital platforms solely on the wisdom and truth found in God's Word. Does this app compromise an antithetical and holy walk? Does this app open the door to strong temptations to defile the heart and mind with sexual filth? These and many other similar questions we are to ask before we download and use any app on our devices.

In the second place, I encourage the readers of the *Standard Bearer* to familiarize themselves with Protect Young Eyes, the services they provide and the content they produce. One of my purposes in writing about McKenna's testimony to the Senate Judiciary Commit-

tee is the opportunity it affords to introduce the organization he founded. Many who are reading this article are already familiar with Protect Young Eyes. But if you are not, may this article serve the purpose of leading you to become acquainted with this invaluable resource for navigating the ever-changing technological world of devices, apps, games, and social media. To keep abreast of the current trends that undoubtedly influence our youth and families is certainly challenging. But in the face of that struggle, may the response of the Christian parent not be a throwing up of our hands in despair saying, "It is impossible to stay on top of what is going on, so why even bother trying!" No, the responsibility of parents is to understand the times and to be aware of what is taking place all around us in this digital world. The current technology inundates the lives of our youth and families, and will always be used as a tool in the hands of the Devil to hurt the church of Jesus Christ. Herein lies the usefulness of Protect Young Eyes, a wonderful resource to keep Christians up to date on the landscape of digital technology as we seek to raise our children and guide our youth in this evil age.

Third, an easy way to do just this is by receiving the Protect Young Eyes weekly newsletter, entitled "PYE Digital Trends," by way of email. I encourage readers to subscribe. In a day when our email inboxes are flooded with worthless junk, here is a free resource worth pursuing on a weekly basis. The weekly newsletter is a curated list of articles addressing up-to-date trends in the digital world. For example, one of the more recent newsletters included a link to an article concerning the recent updates to Snapchat, an app (as made clear by the above quote) that is so very dangerous if its use is not monitored closely and regulated carefully. The article gives parents all the information they would need to make informed and wise decisions concerning their children's use or lack thereof of Snapchat. This is just one example of many that could be given to illustrate the newsletter's value. And if possible, I encourage readers to attend in person a Protect Young Eyes presentation. I am thankful several schools and churches have hosted such a talk. I hope more will follow suit. Much of the content of the presentation can be learned through the website and blog of Protect Young Eyes. However, there is still tremendous value in believers coming together to learn about and discuss this important subject.

In conclusion, I set before parents and leaders the sacred calling to guide and protect their children as they live in a digital age. Should parents simply say, "We trust our son or daughter to use their phone and apps wisely," and leave it at that? I would argue that much more is required. It is well and good that parents have

a certain trust of their children. But healthy trust never eliminates the absolute necessity of exercising wisdom through pointed conversations and accountability. I remind you of the aforementioned testimony of an expert in this field, the sinful natures that cling to each one of us and our children, and the depravity of the world in which we live. The ease with which vile wickedness can be accessed, no matter the level of trust that may be present, demands helpful boundaries and accountability.

To impress the necessity of this upon you, I ask you to translate in your mind the digital world into an analog or physical world. Unrestricted and unaccountable use of the Internet or Snapchat or Instagram allows access to pornography through only a few clicks. That reality is no different than having stacks of pornographic magazines behind the books on your shelves at home. To access the magazines requires the simple action of pulling the books in front of them off the shelves. No Christian parent, of course, would ever allow their chil-

dren or youth to live in such an environment where such evil could be so easily accessed. But unfiltered and unaccountable use of the Internet and certain apps is essentially no different.

May God give us wisdom to guide, but also to protect our children as best we are able. The previously quoted testimony must be taken seriously. The statistics of teenage girls being preyed on sexually as reported above are shockingly high. And that, out of love for the daughters of Christ, should lead every father and mother to be resolved to protect them and equip them with the knowledge and wisdom to live in this depraved and corrupt world. Herein lies the value of reading current events such as the one mentioned at the beginning of this article. Such reports impress upon us the need for wisdom in the raising our children in this age of digital technology. May God grant us such wisdom, and may He be pleased to preserve our children and youth in these last days.