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TESTIMONY OF JEFF McINTYRE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL POLICY CHILDREN NOW

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION,
PRODUCT SAFETY AND INSURANCE**

UNITED STATES SENATE

July 15, 2010

Good Morning Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Wicker and members of the Subcommittee. I'm Jeff McIntyre and I'm the Director of National Policy for Children Now. I'm also the Chair of the Children's Media Policy Coalition, which includes the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the National PTA.

My main concerns are children's health and education - in media. The issues this Subcommittee and the Online Safety and Technology Working Group Report deal with are, frankly, issues we've been dealing with since well before media was prevalent in our children's lives. Predators, bullies, invasion of our children's privacy, their information being used inappropriately, the effects of advertising on our children's health – these are issues that all parents are worried about.

So, why is interactive media important in this? Basic child development teaches us that children learn from the environments they are in – schools, families, religious institutions, and communities. But, according to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation report – the place where children and youth spend most of their time is in the media environment. Children spend more time immersed in media than any other activity. They average just over 7 ½ hours a day in non-academic media – and just under 11 hours a day, if you account for multi-tasking. In today's world, that means children and youth are spending enormous amounts of time interacting with media - and the individuals behind that media. Parents can exert great control over where a child is geographically. In the interactive world, that's an immensely difficult task to do.

This has been an issue for those concerned about children for years - with the introduction of television came the first Congressional hearings on whether it contributed to juvenile delinquency in the 1950's. Violent media, sexualization, unhealthy food marketing – it's about kids receiving information detrimental to their health that is inappropriate for their developmental level. Now, it's no longer just passive watching – it's about children and youth receiving and giving and then receiving targeted – sometimes individualized – information across platforms. Children and youth are no longer just observers of media, soaking up information like a sponge. Now, they are active participants – often bypassing parents – to create and remix – games, websites, social networking profiles, or participate in chat rooms or adver-games. These platforms, however, are increasingly designed for the individual and the software tweaked for that individual.

Every time a child or youth gets propositioned online, bullied, asked for inappropriate information, or sent a coupon on their wireless without their parents actively choosing for that to happen – that parent's authority has been hijacked. It's easy to get stars in our eyes when talking about technology, media, or the latest app. But the basics of what's healthy or harmful for our children have existed since before television and will exist long after the latest platform fad has passed. Simply put, 'Buyer Beware' should not apply to our kids, especially in an interactive environment. Not with predators in chat rooms, not with bullies, and not with advertisers using their information against them.

Let me also say that an over-reliance on media literacy as the panacea to these issues is an incomplete response. Media literacy is about education – about building awareness. It is something that no one is opposed to. However, it is only a small part the overall equation. I think it's important that the Subcommittee understand that 'building awareness' may result in a slow shift of attitude which might influence behavior over an extended period of time – usually years or more. And, even then – the amount of media literacy content is exponentially dwarfed by the amount of contrary, unhealthy media content available and actively marketed to children and youth.

For instance - A 2007 study showed that tweens between 8 and 12 were exposed to almost 8000 ads a year on television alone – the majority of which were for food items, such as candy and fast food. None were

for healthy foods such as fruits or vegetables. One in five ads included a push to the website. That same group would see a PSA only once every three days.

Our boat is small and the ocean of other media is wide and deep.

Education is about citizenship – digital or otherwise. Years of Children Now research on children's media – whether on the effects of media duopolies on children's educational programming, the presence of minorities in children's programming, or the extreme lack of effectiveness of advertising pledges by the food and beverage companies – has demonstrated that industry wide standards tend to meet only the barest minimum dictated by that regulation – whether government or self-regulatory. Then, they punt to public affairs to attempt to shift the burden of responsible media onto the parent or child viewer.

If you think of this with sexual predators – just achieving the lowest common denominator and just talking to our children about sexual predators is a very small step - but it doesn't really come close to helping solve that issue. Other protections need to be put in place to have a comprehensive, truly safe, healthy environment for our children and youth. While media education is incredibly important, it should not be a loophole for structural attention to these issues. Real, demonstrated change must occur in the media environment for our children to be truly safe.

I want to thank Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Wicker and the Subcommittee for their attention and leadership on this issue. Children Now stands ready to offer our assistance and resources to you as we move forward in addressing this critical moment in our media history.