



Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Testimony
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This year, as many of you know, I became a mom and it is important for me to keep my child safe as he grows up and protect him from anyone who would do him harm. Every parent has this wish.

This year I was also introduced to social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. And while intended mainly for high school and college students, these sites are now being used by sexual predators as a way to prey on innocent children.

In fact, an Associated Press story recently reported that MySpace.com has identified more than 29,000 registered sex offenders with profiles – more than four times the number cited by the company two months ago. Today, 1 in 5 children between the ages of 10 and 17 will receive a sexual solicitation online during their lifetime. The FBI estimates that as many as 50,000 child predators are prowling the Internet.

The Internet has unfortunately become an easy avenue for predators to find unsuspecting victims. That is why I have introduced legislation, the *Sex Offender Internet Prohibition Act of 2007*, which imposes mandatory penalties (5-10 years in prison) for individuals who are required to register as a sex offender and knowingly access a website with the intent to communicate with an unsuspecting child. This bill sends a clear message to sex offenders that if they use these Internet sites to contact children they will go to jail.

In fact, a few days after I introduced the legislation police in Peachtree, Georgia arrested a 28-year-old man for exchanging sexually explicit emails and online chats with a 14-year old girl in Liberty Lake, Washington a city in my district. Nearly 4,200 children in Spokane County were victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect in 2005. We must not only focus on keeping children safe from strangers they meet on the street, but protecting them from strangers they meet online.

I would like to take a minute to commend Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna for his work on this issue and for putting together a Youth Internet Safety Task Force focused on keeping the Internet safe for our kids. The goal of the Task Force is to address issues of online predation while at the same time devising ways to combat the proliferation of child pornography and ultimately the sexual exploitation and victimization of children.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify. I am pleased that the Committee is holding this hearing today as an important component of our efforts to reduce crime and keep our communities safe.