

Dear Decisionmakers,

Supposedly your bill is intended to promote safety online and minimize non-consensual sharing of intimate images. And yet, no aspect of the Online Safety Act gives any indication of a good faith attempt to engage with existent understanding of internet policy or the dynamics of abuse.

The internet has permeated every aspect of our lives, and while the new forms of abuse it has fostered are serious issues that warrant political attention, missteps would produce devastating consequences, primarily for the marginalized communities that already bear the brunt of current digital abuse. Luckily, you are not tasked with theorizing over the unpredictable consequences of unprecedented circumstances. In 2018, the United States passed FOSTA-SESTA, a pair of bills that also aimed to reduce internet exploitation by restricting access to sexual content as you now propose. Instead, sex workers were forced to take riskier jobs, sexual health resources disappeared. Sex workers, people of color, disabled people, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community were pushed off of platforms without provocation or repeal, and were left more vulnerable to exploitation for it.

Furthermore, the process laid out in this bill distinctly lacks accountability. The terms are loosely defined and would allow a single, unelected government official to significantly curtail the personal freedoms of an entire nation based on inevitably biased personal conceptions of acceptable social standards. It's particularly offensive that the hiring process, requirements, and system of oversight for the civilian investigators are not specified when they are to be given access to and discretion over intimate content without the consent or knowledge of the relevant persons. The E-Safety Commission could very easily become its own, government sanctioned system of cyber abuse.

Internet access, individual liberty, safety, and privacy are thoroughly intertwined, and this bill addresses none of the complexities within the issues it names. If passed, the Online Safety Act will devastate vulnerable communities. And you won't be able to say you didn't know.