

**Testimony submitted by Nancy Grace
to the
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

**“ Sexual Exploitation of Children over the Internet: What
Parents, Kids and Congress Need to Know about Child
Predators”**

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Washington, DC**

After growing up in a loving home, where there was nothing but soybean fields and tall pine trees as far as the eye could see, I suddenly learned about a whole other world. Suddenly and without warning, I became a victim of violent crime when my fiancé, my college sweetheart was murdered shortly before our wedding. In deep grief, I answered the call not to simply be a victim of violent crime, but to fight it. In that vein, I applied, entered, and graduated from law school and then, had the opportunity to fight violent crime for over ten years in the courtrooms of inner-city Atlanta. During that time, I learned about a world I had never before known existed. A world where rules, as we know them, do not apply...where those more powerful or cunning prey on others that are weaker or simply more innocent than themselves. During that time, I often represented the single most innocent segment of American life, specifically, children.

I learned in court that children speak a language of their own that prosecutors and social workers are hard pressed to understand. Once I broke that barrier, I was pained to learn the suffering of children...not far, far away in another country so we could say “No, no...never here in America!” and put our head to our pillow at night to sleep easy, but here, in this country, in this region, in this state....on this street. Their suffering knows no barrier, white, black, good students, bad students, the well-to-do, the poor.

I can not begin to tell you what I saw with my own two eyes. How many children did I see? Ranging from infants to toddlers to

elementary schoolers beaten horribly, raped, used, covered in cigarette burns, sometimes starved, left alone. Child by child, case by case, jury by jury, I tried so very, very hard to make a difference in these particular children's lives...so that one day they would know when they grew up, that someone had cared, someone had fought for them when they were too young and innocent, too powerless to fight back.

As the years went on, I began to realize that I was simply putting a Band-Aid on a mortal wound... that while I could detect, apprehend, and punish child predators, I had no way of stopping future predators. What could be done, I wondered, besides taking that individual offender off the street after-the-fact? I didn't know the answer...so I just kept on and on and on.

My life-path landed me at Court TV and at CNN's Headline News, where I have the opportunity to continue my battle in another forum. And it is there, at Headline News, I first learned of Masha. When I told Headline News executives of her story, the call to try and DO SOMETHING was heard. Together, we join forces in asking you for her, for our voices to be heard.

The threat of internet child predators is like no other. Some studies put numbers of child internet victims at one in five young internet users. (Youth Internet Safety Survey, 2001). When asked, many of the children stated the solicitation made them feel extremely upset or afraid. Ninety-seven percent of the solicitors were strangers. (Id.) Shockingly, seventy percent of these unwanted solicitations happened when the child was using a computer in their own home.

These statistics became real to me the evening I met Masha, a tiny little girl who now, has a big, big voice. As you know, her case highlights so many grievous failings of the legal system, ranging from illegal foreign adoptions and what can go so horribly wrong, to undetected full-blown child molestation that went undetected by teachers, friends, and neighbors from Masha's age five to age ten. Most of us have memories of birthday cakes, Christmas trees. School bus rides and dinners around the family table each night. Not Masha. Her early childhood memories are those of fear, pain, and sexual

exploitation at the hands of a man we now know to be virtual clearing house for internet child pornography.

In addition to the outright abuse he heaped on his own adopted child for years, dozens and dozens of photos of her in pornographic poses remain forever in cyberspace, traded like baseball cards amongst child predators. It is horrific. It is wrong.

And now, technology has made it so easy for these twisted perpetrators to not only fuel their own sick appetites for our children through internet child pornography, but to allow them a window into every home in America where a child is sleeping, playing, setting the table, doing their homework. In addition, the so-called Super Highway is just that, and serves as a pit stop for predators to gather, share stories, share their illegal photos, and pass on tips to each other as to how better to meet little children, then seduce, and even abduct them.

This child, Masha, a little girl for Pete's sake, has been so very, very brave. A staggering majority of child molestation victims never speak out, never make a peep, and go on living their lives in quiet desperation, never really being free of the albatross hanging around their necks, a hidden pain and feeling of helplessness like no other. Not openly has this child come forward and spoken out, she has made her way here, to our nation's capital, to ask for you to act.

As it was written "a little child shall lead us," and so she has. She has displayed more courage in her short life than many will show in a lifetime. I am here today on behalf of every child victim I ever represented, of every child victim I never met, on behalf of those who are too weak or young or innocent or simply too afraid to speak out, to ask you for your help in passing legislation that will not only crack down upon, but help stop ongoing child sex predators.

I am so proud to be here today. My prayer is that you will use your power to protect the weakest among us.

Thank you.

