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TO: MONTANA SENATE AND JUDICIAL COMMITTEES

FROM: JERRY L. NORDSTROM, L.C.S.W., P.C.

SUBJECT: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECT OF EXPLICIT SEXUAL MATERIAL ON CHILDREN

I have been a psychotherapist working with children and their families for the past twenty-four years. I have seen children exposed to almost every kind of neglect and abuse situation imaginable. One of the most insidious is what happens to a child who is exposed to explicit sexual material or conduct. We call it being "sexualized."

One of the most precious gifts that we as human beings have been given is our sexuality. Another is our innocence. Although we are all sexual beings from birth, there is a period of innocence that should not be disturbed. When it is disturbed the emotional and psychological growth is disturbed as well. Once there is sexual knowledge no matter what age it becomes part of the individual's thoughts and actions.

The normal sexual curiosity that most children experience is eclipsed by far in those children who are exposed to explicit sexual material. They begin far too early to experiment with what they have learned. Let me present just a couple of brief case histories to illustrate what and how it happens.

Case #1:

The parents had thought their X-rated videos were hidden. The children found them and watched (3 kids). This lead to inviting 3 other children to watch and then try some of the sexual practices they saw. All of these children were between six and nine years of age. One six-year-old girl had an object inserted into her vagina. All of the kids took turns "humping" each other.

Case #2:

An older brother (17) was left to baby sit two younger siblings (9- and 11-year-old boys). A friend of the 17-year-old brought an X-rated video to the home. They proceeded to watch the video with the two youngsters present but swore them not to tell. They didn't tell the parents but related all the details to many friends at school on Monday. Eventually the word got to a teacher and then back to the parents. These children needed to be in counseling because of this encounter.

Case #3:

> A single parent alcoholic mother of two children (girl six and boy nine) had material showing sexual positions and practices. After it was found by her children they invited two other children (girl six and boy eight) to see the material. They had a "humping party" and also experimented with oral sex on each other.

Once exposed to explicit sexual practices a child becomes "sexualized" and will never be able to return to an age of innocence. Once the knowledge is there, the next step is use. Once use is begun without mature understanding and discretion, it turns to abuse.

The issue is not so much of one of personal freedom as we hear so often as it is of protection. Don't our children deserve our protection? If we are to error, let it be on the side of the children.

JLN/dg