



AG Fitch: Criminalizing Revenge Porn Gives Victims Hope, Dignity, and a Better Future

Lynn Fitch

May 20, 2021

On April 16, 2021, Governor Reeves signed into law S.B. 2121, and Mississippi joined 47 other states in criminalizing “revenge porn” and protecting innocent people from repeated victimization.

Technically, revenge porn is the non-consensual distribution or publication of sexually explicit visual materials – images or videos – with the intent to harm the victim. But in human terms, it is turning someone’s most private moments into public entertainment. Whether the motive for posting the pictures is revenge, profit, or a twisted sense of fun, the impact on the victim is the same. The victim is subjected to an endless loop of humiliation and shame, and sometimes job loss, stalking, or worse.

Think about some common scenarios: A young girl is experiencing “love” for the first time and her boyfriend convinces her to send him a sexually suggestive photo of herself. He promises it is just for him. But he keeps it and one day when they break up, he sends it out to their classmates to embarrass her. Someone at school posts it online. And soon this young girl is not studying or going to soccer practice or hanging out with her friends. She is spending all her time sending takedown notices to Twitter, Snapchat, Reddit, and even Pornhub to try to end her humiliation.

Or consider the young married couple that decides to record their intimacy. Years later, after a nasty divorce, the ex-husband releases those videos. Their most private moments of love become a quick profit for total strangers. How does she explain that to her parents or her children when it surfaces on YouTube?

Sometimes, these videos or images are not consensual even at the time of their creation. This is the case for human trafficking victims. Human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar, violent industry. It can be physical, verbal, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse that traps its victims into a life of slavery. That abuse is often captured in images, and their shame and pain are sold repeatedly.

A drug dealer sells his drug once. A trafficker can sell his victim over and over and over again, and revenge porn just makes it easier to reach more customers.

Victims often talk about the unbearable shame that can come from feeling like everyone they pass on the street has seen them at their most vulnerable and in their most intimate moments. The trauma can extend to families forced to uproot from schools, cities, or states they know and love in an effort to run away from their past.

Some victims are overwhelmed by the never-ending necessity of checking Pornhub and asking them to take down the same video they took down just weeks earlier. Some turn to drugs or alcohol or succumb to the belief that these cheapened images must be who they are. Some even take their own lives. These are our sisters, our daughters, our friends.

Under this new law, a person can be sentenced to jail and/or fines if they disclose visual material that depicts another’s intimate parts or another engaged in sexual conduct without their consent and with intent to harm. A person also commits an offense if they threaten to disclose this material to obtain some benefit in exchange for not disclosing it.

By criminalizing revenge porn, we give victims control over their lives. No longer can they be held helplessly captive by an abuser who threatens to release their most intimate moments. No longer will the perpetrators continue to profit with impunity at their expense. Through this law, we can give victims hope, dignity, and a better future.