

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 10, 2023
1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Sarah Vance, Chair
Representative Jamie Allard, Vice Chair
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative David Eastman
Representative Andrew Gray
Representative Cliff Groh

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Ben Carpenter

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

LIEUTENANT RYAN BROWNING, Lieutenant
Homer Police Department
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on parenting in the digital age.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:00:12 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR JAMIE ALLARD called the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Representative Allard was present at the call to order. Representatives C. Johnson, Gray, Groh, Eastman, and Vance arrived as the meeting was in progress.

The committee took an at-ease from 1:00 p.m. to 1:04 p.m.

PRESENTATION(S): Parenting in the Digital Age

[1:04:41 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ALLARD announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by Lieutenant Ryan Browning, Homer Police Department.

[1:06:22 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT RYAN BROWNING, Lieutenant, Homer Police Department, gave a PowerPoint presentation on parenting in the digital age.

[1:07:44 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:07 p.m.

[1:08:20 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT BROWNING gave an overview of his personal background and his experience in law enforcement. Beginning the presentation on slide 1, he shared several personal anecdotes to highlight the negative impact of the Internet and social media use on young people. He emphasized the importance of parents talking to their kids openly, honestly, and often, as poor digital decision making is the "cause" of digital mistakes. According to the Surgeon General, 13 is too early to join social media. He stressed the importance of teaching children proficiency and safety before using a digital device; more importantly, that Internet activity is public and permanent. Parents should teach their kids to guard their privacy, protect their reputation, assume everyone is watching, and remember that nothing is private. Talking about the risks at every age - porn/inappropriate content, online privacy, sexting, sexual solicitation, cyberbullying, and sextortion - will help them build proficiency and skills over time. He discussed Roblox and other gaming platforms that have been recently publicized for dangerous and inappropriate encounters. Kids who come from a broken home are more susceptible to this abuse because they are looking for someone with shared experiences to connect with, and predators will take advantage of that.

[1:40:23 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:40 p.m.

[1:41:43 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT BROWNING suggested that parents utilize Instagram's family notification center to receive follower updates; set usage limits; and view a child's privacy, messaging, and updates if anything changes. In addition, parents should be creating their own account to follow their kids, participate in third party monitoring, and utilize settings that control comments, the ability to share stories, and request approval for photos. Alternatively, Snapchat is more insidious because there's no age verification, allows messages to disappear, and encourages frequent use with "snap streaks" and "snap scores." Sexting is a common occurrence among young people that starts at age 8 with roughly 14 to 20 percent of kids sending sex messages and 25 percent receiving them. In Alaska, 36 to 37 percent of high school age kids are sexually active according to a 2019 survey. Alaska's "unlawful exploitation of a minor" law is outlined in AS 11.41.455, which can result in serious consequences for behavior such as sending or forwarding a nude photo. He emphasized the prevalence of cyberbullying, with an estimated 60 percent of children having experienced it. Alaska does not have a cyberbullying statute; however, most school districts have a policy that addresses bullying. In situations where cyberbullying originates from a private, non-school computer or electronic device, and is brought to the attention of school officials, disciplinary measures may be imposed under certain conditions. If the behavior is elevated to taunts that are likely to provoke violence or anonymous obscene communication, harassment in the second degree may apply.

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LIEUTENANT BROWNING pointed out that social media rewards sexualization and superficial beauty, which is affecting young girls in particular. A 2021 Wall Street Journal article revealed that Facebooks knows that Instagram is toxic for teen girls. Facebook acknowledged that Instagram is hurting teens' mental health by creating pressure to conform to social stereotypes; match the money and body shapes of influencers; crave validation with views, likes, followers, and shares; spur friendship conflicts, bullying, hate speech, and over sexualization. Alaska agencies have seen a rise in teen-on-teen violence and the Alaska Youth Risk Survey highlighted a significant increase in students feeling sad or hopeless, and considering, planning for, or attempting suicide in the past 12 months. He urged parents, siblings, and extended family to check in with their young girls in particular. He shared a

video of Amanda Todd's suicide story and stressed the prevalence of suicidal ideation in Alaska communities. He reiterated the importance of parents having these tough, honest conversations with their kids and listening to them. Parents should consider saving digital evidence; setting up new accounts; and talking to schools, counselors, and trusted adults. Parents should look out for increased online time, gifts, inability to sleep, meltdowns, a sudden stop in device use, nerves when opening a text or email, unease about school, being withdrawn, calls from unknown numbers, deleted history, and minimizing screens. Professionals encourage parents to set ground rules for device use; no devices in bed; education around social media platforms; and frequent engagement. He shared resources for teens in crisis.

[2:38:48 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR ALLARD invited questions from members of the committee.

[Vice Chair Allard returned the gavel to Chair Vance.]

CHAIR VANCE asked for Lieutenant Browning's recommendations to lawmakers.

LIEUTENANT BROWNING said the biggest factor is education. He added he would not know how to legislate the issue; nonetheless, the goal of the presentation is to open people's eyes to what's happening in real life. In response to a series of questions, he said he was unsure whether limiting kids' screen time to one hour a day would be realistic, but "something is better than nothing." He said he does not know why the rates of teen-on-teen sexual violence is rising among kids aged 16-18, but surmised that the COVID-19 Pandemic, pornography, and desensitization could be factors.

[2:52:10 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:52 p.m.