U.S. Department of Justice

Criminal Division

Office of the Assistant Attorney General *Washington, D.C. 20530*

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Dear State Boards of Education, School Superintendents, School-Based Professionals, Youth Athletics Organizations, Youth Serving Organizations, and all Other Organizations Who Have a Role to Play in Keeping Children Safe:

We write to you about a difficult but deeply important issue: the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. We invite you to partner with The Department of Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS) to combat this threat and discharge our shared duty to keep our children safe.

As children and teens spend ever-increasing amounts of time on the internet, social media, and in online gaming and virtual reality environments, they are at increasingly greater risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Although online sexual exploitation and abuse has long been a grave threat to children, in recent years the threat has grown substantially in scale, complexity, and dangerousness.

In 2025, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children received 21.3 million reports of suspected child exploitation involving more than 61.8 million images, videos, and other files. Three emerging threats in particular—sextortion (including financially motivated sextortion), sadistic online exploitation, and the misuse of artificial intelligence to generate photorealistic, sexually explicit deepfake images of children—are endangering our children at dramatically increasing rates and in more severe ways. More than three dozen U.S. teens have committed suicide related to financially motivated sextortion, and countless other victims have suffered greatly. In one instance, a teen committed suicide within one hour of the first contact by the online predator. That is how grave this situation can be. In addition, children around our nation are harming themselves and others when offenders manipulate and coerce them into engaging in all manner of degrading and sadistic acts. Seemingly every day, more children endure the anger, confusion, fear, and anxiety that results from being the victim of a sexually explicit deepfake image or video.

Combatting these threats, as well as long-existing threats like grooming, sex trafficking, and the production of child sexual abuse material requires sustained dedication, outreach, and education. Engaging in this type of prevention and education work can be difficult. **We are here to partner with you.** We can provide resources, guidance, training, and advice. We can help facilitate the delivery of prevention programming. We can work to connect you with prevention experts in your