

Urge Appropriations Committee to Address Cyber Stalking, Harassment, and Threats

Dear Colleague,

Please join me in asking the Appropriations Committee to include report language urging the Department of Justice to intensify their efforts to combat cyber stalking, harassment, and threats.

The ongoing “Gamergate” intimidation campaign has highlighted the real world consequences of cyber abuse. The women targeted by “Gamergate activists” have been repeatedly subjected to explicit threats of rape and murder, their personal information has been disclosed, and several have been forced to flee their homes and cancel public events. These threats have not only impacted these women’s lives and their ability to work, they have the potential to silence female voices and deter young women from entering their chosen profession.

While the women targeted by “Gamergate” might be the most public examples of online intimidation, the sad reality is that millions of women are faced with online abuse. From domestic violence victims to journalists, women are increasingly confronted with the reality that using the Internet in their personal and professional lives may subject them to abhorrent gender-based abuse.

The federal government is not responsible for policing the Internet, but it is responsible for protecting the women who are being threatened with rape and murder in violation of existing federal law. We must not allow the Internet to be closed to female voices, and intensifying the enforcement of existing law is an important first step toward keeping the Internet open to everyone.

If you have any questions or would like to sign on, please contact Steve Thornton (5-2836) at Steve.Thornton@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

The Honorable John Culberson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Fattah,

As you work to develop the Fiscal Year 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, we write to express our support for report language highlighting the importance of addressing the impact of stalking, harassment, and threats carried out in interstate commerce via the Internet.

According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center 73% of adult internet users have witnessed online harassment and 25% have seen someone threatened with physical violence. Moreover, 20% of adults have been affected by cyber stalking, persistent harassing e-mails, or other unwanted online contact. While many perpetrators may not actually intend to carry out their threats of violence, it is clear that the threats themselves have real world consequences, which have been highlighted by the ongoing "Gamergate" intimidation campaign.

"Gamergate" has been marked by threats of murder, rape, violence, and severe harassment of female participants in the video game industry. These women have been targeted by anonymous Internet users and have been repeatedly subjected to explicit threats of rape and murder, their personal information has been disclosed, and several have been forced to flee their homes and cancel public events. These threats have not only impacted these women's lives and their ability to work, they have the potential to silence female voices and deter young women from entering their chosen profession.

While the women targeted by "Gamergate" might be the most public examples of online intimidation, the sad reality is that millions of women are faced with online abuse. From domestic violence victims to journalists, women are increasingly confronted with the reality that using the Internet in their personal and professional lives may subject them to abhorrent gender-based abuse.

Congress has already acted to criminalize certain aspects of this behavior. 18 U.S.C. 875 makes it a federal crime to transmit threats of bodily injury in interstate commerce and 18 U.S.C. 2261a criminalizes the use of electronic communication to place a person in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury. Yet, despite the prevalence of this problem federal prosecutors pursued only 10 cyber stalking cases between 2010 and 2013. The federal government must do more to protect its citizens against these crimes.

As a result, we ask that the Committee include language in the committee report urging the Department of Justice to intensify their efforts to investigate and prosecute cyber harassment, stalking, and threat crimes. Specifically, we ask that the following language be included in the committee report to the Department of Justice:

The Committee is concerned with the increased instances of severe harassment, stalking, and threats transmitted in interstate commerce in violation of federal law. These targeted attacks against Internet users, particularly women, have resulted in the release of personal information, forced individuals to flee their homes, has had a chilling effect on free expression, and are limiting access to economic opportunity. The Committee strongly urges the Department to intensify its efforts to combat this destructive abuse and expects to see increased investigations and prosecutions of these crimes.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you and the Committee to strengthen the federal response to these crimes.

Sincerely,

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress