

I am Erin Henninger. I am a 29 year old occupational therapist who moved to Topeka 3 years ago. I became addicted to pornography when I was 16.

I grew up in Washington State as one of 7 children. I was blessed with two loving parents and a play-filled, homeschooled upbringing. We were devout in our Catholic faith and thankfully sheltered from much of the mess in our world.

My world shattered when I was 15. My newest sibling, Gianna Caeli, was diagnosed with a chromosomal abnormality before she was born. We prepared for the best & worst over the remaining pregnancy. Our family was given 2 weeks with her after she was born. Then she passed away from a heart defect. The whole family grieved in radically different ways. A few months later I developed an anxiety and panic disorder with no previous issues. It took a lot of work to get it under control and feel 'stable'.

My main method of consolation for my grief and anxiety was reading. I escaped into both romance novels and online fan fiction. I joined websites where book fans would discuss characters and interact and post pictures. These spoke to my hunger as a shy teen girl to feel belonging and love. Gradually I got deeper in from written sex scenes to pictures to 'soft' pornography. And then to harder and more depraved images. At the time I wasn't aware of how deeply addicted I was getting.

I have been struggling with a compulsion to interact with pornography for 14 years. It impacts my mental health, substantially. There is a lot of shame and self-hatred around sexuality and romance. There are body image issues. Depression and anxiety symptoms worsen when I use pornography. I recall for the first several years feeling completely unable to get help or tell anyone. It made me pull away from my parents and be more secretive with other matters. It made it hard to form deep friendships, especially with boys. It made me reluctant to try dating at all. When I do date, I am more withdrawn and slow to engage emotionally. Porn tends to color all sexual and romantic activity negatively in my head. I'm still working to see sexual desires as good, but it is challenging. Spiritually this compulsion has led me to think I can't lead or be involved in church activities. At times I even skipped or hated going to Sunday Mass. Normally I cherish and am nourished by church involvement.

Despite the healing and progress being made, I am still impacted by pornography addiction. I could have been spared years of emotional and relational pain if I hadn't had access to online pornography. I could also have avoided broken relationships with friends, family, & boyfriends. I could have had a carefree high school and college experience where I could fully engage with my faith and community. I could have dealt much more effectively with mental health challenges if porn hadn't complicated and exacerbated them.

I support SB 394. I dearly want to spare children the deep woundedness and distortions that come with viewing pornography. I want them to learn to relate to self and others in a healthy, holistic, and person-centered way. They deserve to maintain their innocence and integrity. They are owed protection from this depravity that will alter their developing brains. I urge you, based on my own personal experience of the damage porn causes to support SB 394.

Yours in protecting our youth,

Erin Henninger