

29 July 2013

The Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms McDonald

SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO CYBER SAFETY (SEXTING)

Optus appreciates the opportunity to provide our comments to the Committee's Inquiry into options for addressing the issue of sexting by minors.

Optus recognises the Inquiry has a primary focus on sexting rather than broader cyber safety matters (such as bullying, protection of personal information, safe communications with others online) or cyber security (which is more to do with technological threats such as spam, viruses, hacking),.

We recognise there are organisations with more expertise to comment in detail on sexting. Naturally, Optus' perspective is that of a provider of mobile telecommunications and internet service provider not that of an organization with specific expertise in sexting matters that are the subject of this Inquiry,

Nevertheless, Optus has proactively undertaken activities to assist in educating youth on the dangers and risks of sexting and to familiarise them with the 'fourth emergency service' Kids Helpline, who we believe are best equipped to help youth tackle these issues before or after they occur.

Optus participates in a number of cyber safety programs that address sexting (amongst other topics). Some information on these programs is outlined below:

1. ERASING CYBERBULLYING

In 2011, Optus and Kids Helpline realised there was a need for high quality and credible resources to help address issues such as cyber safety, cyber bullying and sexting from the misuse of technology or devices. As a result, we collaborated to develop a pack called "Erasing Cyberbullying" which was sent out to every school in Australia, providing a potential reach of approximately 3.5 million children. This pack was designed for teachers to educate students on the aforementioned key issues and contained detailed lesson plans and video resources. It was deliberately designed to deliver key messages on these topics in a positive way.

The resources referred to in the pack are available on the Kids Helpline and Optus websites: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/grownups/getting-help/cyberspace/sexting.php>. In addition,

should any members of the Committee be interested in obtaining a copy of the Erasing Cyberbullying pack, please let me know and we will post a copy out to them.

2. KIDS HELPLINE @ SCHOOL

Optus and Kids Helpline have also just launched Kids Helpline @ School. This national primary school program is delivered via Skype. It gives students the opportunity to talk with a counselor in a group discussion about topics influencing their lives. This could include any topics such as sexting, relationships or bullying.

Teachers work with a Kids Helpline counsellor to deliver the classroom session and are provided with activities and resources to help prepare for the video or phone link up. The classroom sessions aim to increase each participant's knowledge about the topic and enhance their capacity to deal with the issue at school and in their lives. Sessions are designed with the general capabilities of the Australian curriculum in mind.

3. DIGITAL THUMBPRINT

In August 2013, we will commence a new pilot program called "Digital Thumbprint". This pilot aims to develop well-informed, responsible and proactive members of Australia's online community now and in the future.

The program was created in close consultation with leading education experts and will be delivered to secondary schools in metropolitan NSW and VIC by a team of excellent facilitators. The program contains three face-to-face, curriculum-aligned workshops tailored to the needs of specific year groups that empower and inform Australia's young digital natives.

The workshop is designed for year nine and year ten students. It covers intention versus impact of online behaviour with a segment specifically devoted to sexting. The content of this section discusses the real life example of youths arrested in a Melbourne school for sexting. (See: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/four-teens-arrested-over-sexting-scandal-at-school-in-melbourne8217s-west/story-fni0fee2-1226673599544>.) It also covers the following important key points on sexting:

- The legalities applicable to all those involved in sexting including, and importantly not often understood, that a person under age who takes a "selfy" (self-portrait) and distributes that can themselves be charged;
- That although sites such as Snapchat have a self-destruct image for photos, those photos can be copied and distributed by various methods before they self-destruct; and
- Once anything is put online you can never get it back.

By making digital education fun and interactive, Digital Thumbprint teaches students the advantages of a positive online presence whilst arming them with the facts they need to stay safe online in a way students can understand, use and enjoy.

4. ADDITIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to our work with Kids Helpline, as a responsible telecommunications company and a participant in the Internet Industry Association (IIA) Family Friendly ISP program, we believe that we do play a role in assisting to educate society as well as our customers about sexting. It is for this reason that Optus participates as a corporate partner in many government and industry initiatives, such as the Australian Consumer Fraud Taskforce's annual Fraud Week and the recent National Cyber Security Awareness Week. We also provided input into the ACMA's recently launched Digital Citizenship Guide.

We have information on our own website (at www.optuszoo.com.au/online-safety) on a range of cyber safety topics and provide links to other resources, such as the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Cybersmart website.

The communications industry, our regulators and government agencies have all been involved in developing customer awareness and education materials to address cyber safety issues, with a focus on training programs for school-aged children. Some examples of these are:

- the ACMA's Cybersmart Detectives / Cybersmart Hero program (see www.cybersmart.gov.au);
- the Federal Government's Budd:e E-Security Education Package (see www.staysmartonline.gov.au);
- the IIA's Security Portal, which contains links to resources on (for example) cyberbullying (see www.security.iaa.net.au/cyberbullying/); and
- the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) has developed a range of tip sheets and other information materials on topics such as:
 - Bullying and mobile phones – tips for parents;
 - Bullying and mobile phones – tips for teens;
 - Acceptable use policy for mobiles in schools;
 - Camera phone safety and etiquette;
 - And a website called Str8 Talk that provides information for young people on mobiles (www.str8tlk.amta.org.au). This website provides information on both bullying and safety matters.

In the 2011 Kids Helpline Overview document, sexting was the second most searched topic by teens on the Kids Helpline website (after cyberbullying), so clearly sexting is of concern to youth, their parents and carers, and we commend the Committee for investigating this.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide our comments and share information about our programs that address this important matter, and we look forward to hearing about the outcomes of the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

David Epstein
Vice President, Corporate and Regulatory Affairs