

Pornography warning label bill clears House committee

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A state bill requiring warning labels on pornography won favorable reviews Tuesday from Utah lawmakers who said they were tired of “playing nice” with distributors of obscene material. The prewritten label that Rep. Brady Brammer, R-Highland, has in mind would state that pornography can impair a minor’s “brain development, emotional development, and the ability to maintain intimate relationships.”

Exposure to the material might also lead to “harmful and addictive sexual behavior, low self-esteem, and the improper objectification of and sexual violence towards others, among other numerous harms,” the label would continue.

Failure to affix such a label to a print publication or display it for 15 seconds before digital material could result in steep fines for pornography distributors — who’d be policed by the Utah Attorney General’s Office and by citizen enforcers who’d be eligible for a piece of the payments.

The House Judiciary Committee voted 9-2 in favor of the legislation, HB243, after several strongly worded speeches about the harms of pornographic material.

“I’m sorry, but if you want to threaten my kids, I’m not playing nice anymore,” Rep. Eric Hutchings, R-Kearns, said during the hearing.

And Rep. Travis Seegmiller said the bill's proposed fine of up to \$2,500 per violation didn't seem steep enough.

"The nature of the damage is so extensive and severe and pervasive and destructive and horrific that to be honest ... this seems like chump change compared to what's happening to our kids," the St. George Republican said.

The response from pornography distributors has been by turns cheeky and irate since Brammer's bill made news last week. One pornography website decided to troll Utah lawmakers by launching targeted warning label that said "porn may lead to decreased stress, increased happiness, and lower rates of teen pregnancy."

The ACLU of Utah has expressed concern that the bill might have a chilling effect on free speech, and Brammer said during the hearing that he's confident the measure will face a legal challenge if approved by the Legislature.

However, after considering Brammer's idea, legislative attorneys concluded that a carefully crafted bill — in which the warning label sticks to "factual content" — would likely survive a judicial review.

Now that the bill has won support from the judiciary committee, it will head to the House floor for debate.