

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 3898

To authorize the National Science Foundation to support research on the impact of online social media platforms on the maintenance or expansion of human trafficking, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 22, 2022

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To authorize the National Science Foundation to support research on the impact of online social media platforms on the maintenance or expansion of human trafficking, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Human Trafficking
5 Online Research Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. NSF SUPPORT OF RESEARCH ON IMPACTS OF SO-**
7 **CIAL MEDIA ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING.**

8 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) HUMAN TRAFFICKING.—The term “human
2 trafficking” means an act or practice described in
3 paragraph (11) or paragraph (12) of section 103 of
4 the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22
5 U.S.C. 7102).

6 (2) SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM.—The term “so-
7 cial media platform” means a website or internet
8 medium that—

9 (A) permits a person to become a reg-
10 istered user, establish an account, or create a
11 profile for the purpose of allowing users to cre-
12 ate, share, and view user-generated content
13 through such an account or profile;

14 (B) enables 1 or more users to generate
15 content that can be viewed by other users of the
16 medium; and

17 (C) primarily serves as a medium for users
18 to interact with content generated by other
19 users of the medium.

20 (3) COMMERCIAL SEX ACT.—The term “com-
21 mercial sex act” means any sex act on account of
22 which anything of value, including money, drugs,
23 shelter, food, or clothing, is given to or received by
24 any person.

1 (b) SUPPORT OF RESEARCH.—The Director of the
2 National Science Foundation, in consultation with the
3 heads of other relevant Federal agencies, shall support
4 merit-reviewed and competitively awarded research on the
5 impact of online social media platforms on the mainte-
6 nance or expansion of human trafficking, which may in-
7 clude—

8 (1) fundamental research on digital forensic
9 tools or other technologies for verifying the authen-
10 ticity of social media platform users and their mate-
11 rials, that are utilized in the promotion or operation
12 of human trafficking networks;

13 (2) fundamental research on privacy preserving
14 technical tools that may aid law enforcement’s abil-
15 ity to identify and prosecute individuals or entities
16 promoting or involved in human trafficking;

17 (3) social and behavioral research related to so-
18 cial media platform users who engage with those
19 promoting or involved in human trafficking;

20 (4) research on the effectiveness of expanding
21 public understanding, awareness, or law enforcement
22 efforts in combating human trafficking through so-
23 cial media platforms; and

24 (5) research awards coordinated with other
25 Federal agencies and programs, including the Infor-

1 mation Integrity Research and Development Inter-
2 agency Working Group and the Privacy Research
3 and Development Interagency Working Group of the
4 Networking and Information Technology Research
5 and Development Program, the Office for Victims of
6 Crime of the Department of Justice, the Blue Cam-
7 paign of the Department of Homeland Security, the
8 Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Per-
9 sons of the Department of State, and activities of
10 the Department of Transportation and the Advisory
11 Committee on Human Trafficking.

12 (c) REPORTS.—

13 (1) FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.—Not
14 later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this
15 Act, the Director of the National Science Founda-
16 tion shall report to the Committee on Commerce,
17 Science, and Transportation of the Senate, the Sub-
18 committee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Re-
19 lated Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations
20 of the Senate, the Committee on Science, Space, and
21 Technology of the House of Representatives, and the
22 Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and
23 Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropria-
24 tions of the House of Representatives—

1 (A) the Director's findings with respect to
2 the feasibility for research opportunities, includ-
3 ing with the private sector social media plat-
4 form companies, to improve the ability to com-
5 bat human trafficking operations; and

6 (B) any recommendations of the Director
7 that could facilitate and improve communica-
8 tion and coordination among the private sector,
9 the National Science Foundation, and relevant
10 Federal agencies to improve the ability to com-
11 bat human trafficking operations through social
12 media.

13 (2) RESULTS OF RESEARCH.—Not later than 4
14 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the
15 Director of the National Science Foundation shall
16 report to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
17 Transportation of the Senate, the Subcommittee on
18 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies of
19 the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, the
20 Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the
21 House of Representatives, and the Subcommittee on
22 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies of
23 the Committee on Appropriations of the House of
24 Representatives on the results of the research sup-
25 ported under this section.

1 (d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-
2 tion shall be construed to affect materials and actions as-
3 sociated with legal commercial sex acts.

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