

Testimony of Michael D. Gallagher
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U.S. Department of Commerce
before the
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Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet
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Chairman Upton, I would like to thank you and the members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify here today. This committee was the impetus behind the effort to create safe spaces on the Internet for children. I appreciate the opportunity to review with you the steps that the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has taken to implement the Dot Kids Act. I also want to acquaint you with our plans to develop the full potential of the kids.us domain.

Background

The Dot Kids Act reflects the significant role the Internet now plays in the lives of our children. According to NTIA's 2002 report *A Nation Online*, almost 60 percent of American children between the ages of 5 and 17 use the Internet. Ninety-nine percent of public schools in the United States had access to the Internet according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics as of fall 2002.

Internet access has benefited children enormously by giving them new research tools and information sources, new avenues of expression, expanded and more collaborative learning opportunities, and connections to other communities. Parents want the Internet to be a place where children can access educational material and enjoy their experience. The kids.us space provides us with an opportunity to create a unique place to do that.

Unfortunately, Internet access also potentially exposes children to unsafe content. While some children have actively sought out inappropriate content, many others unwittingly have been confronted with pornography, indecent materials, hate sites and violent images. Some children, through participation in chat rooms and other interactive forums, have become vulnerable to online stalkers or predators. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) considers online child pornography and child sexual exploitation to be the most significant cyber crime problem confronting the FBI that involves crimes against children. Between fiscal years 1996 and 2002 the number of online child pornography and child sexual exploitation cases opened by the FBI went from 113 to 2,370, representing a 1,997 percent increase in just 6 years.

The Dot Kids Act

Congress responded to these growing concerns by passing the Dot Kids Act, which gives parents and educators an additional tool to help protect children from these dangers. When President Bush signed the Dot Kids Act into law, he hailed it as "a wise and necessary

step to safeguard our children while they use computers and discover the great possibilities of the Internet.”

As you know, NTIA awarded NeuStar a contract in October 2001 to manage the .us domain. The Dot Kids Act required NTIA to amend this contract to establish a child-friendly space. NTIA was also required to oversee the development of kids.us in accordance with specific content, enforcement and registration obligations. The law also directed NTIA to publicize the availability of the new domain and educate parents regarding the use of the kids.us domain in combination with blocking and filtering technologies.

Establishing a Safe Kids.us Space

With respect to the management of the .us contract, NeuStar has met our expectations by expanding the .us domain. NeuStar has also worked cooperatively with NTIA to implement the provisions of the Dot Kids Act. Since the Act’s passage in December 2002, NeuStar has met the following contractual obligations.

In February 2003, NTIA modified the existing .us contract with NeuStar to create a kids.us space. In May 2003, NTIA and NeuStar reached an agreement on the procedures, policies, subcontracts and fee schedule to implement kids.us. On September 4, 2003, NeuStar opened the registration of kids.us, three months before the deadline established by the Act. Four days later, the Smithsonian Institute posted the first active web site within kids.us. In November 2003, the Department of Commerce approved NeuStar’s subcontract with KidsNet, a Florida company that is providing content review and monitoring services for kids.us. And finally, on December 4, 2003, NeuStar submitted the first annual report to Congress on the development and implementation of kids.us.

In the eight months since the creation of the kids.us space, over 1,700 domain names have been registered in kids.us, such as Crayola.kids.us, Hasbro.kids.us, Lego Land.kids.us, CuriousGeorge.kids.us, and Yahoooligans.kids.us. Currently, kids.us is home to thirteen active websites. These websites showcase information about arts and entertainment, computers and technology, sports and recreation, science and government, and much more. For example, the Smithsonian Institute hosts information about the Apollo 11 mission to the moon and America’s Presidents and First Ladies. The General Services Administration website provides kid-friendly information about the U.S. Government. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) website teaches children about the hazards of severe weather such as tornadoes, lightning, hurricanes and winter storms. And, the ABCKids website features games and activities from their most popular Saturday morning cartoon line-up.

Furthermore, parents can use this new domain in conjunction with existing screening and filtering technology. For example, parents or teachers can adjust their web browsers to restrict children’s browsing to the kids.us domain. They can also use existing technologies that are already installed on their computer systems in conjunction with kids.us to protect their children. These added technology protections will help ensure that children have safe experiences when they go online.

Publicizing the New Domain

NTIA believes that there is still much work to be done to help generate widespread interest and support for kids.us. At a kick-off event in July 2003, NTIA held a public briefing in conjunction with this Committee here in the Rayburn Office building. As you will recall, this briefing announced the availability of kids.us and encouraged registration of domain names and use of this domain space.

Last October, President Bush declared a “Protection from Pornography Week” and highlighted the availability of the kids.us domain as part of the Administration’s efforts to protect children from harmful online content.

NTIA has also made a concerted effort to reach broadly across government, corporate and non-profit sectors to promote the availability of the kids.us domain. NTIA sent over 70 letters to various U.S. government departments and agencies, encouraging their participation in kids.us. As a result, approximately 80 names have been reserved for future use by these agencies. Additionally, NTIA’s webpage prominently displays a link to the kids.us registry website through the kids.us logo.

Last month, Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans also sent letters to 39 companies and organizations with interesting children’s content on their websites. The Secretary encouraged groups, such as Big Brother Big Sisters, Major League Baseball, the National 4-H Council, Viacom and the Children’s Television Workshop, to register a kids.us name and post child-friendly content on the site. We are hopeful that these stewards of children-friendly content will meet the call.

The Road Ahead

NTIA has additional plans to develop the kids.us domain. We plan to host a forum this summer highlighting the kids.us domain as well as the filtering and blocking technology available to parents and teachers to use in conjunction with the domain. This forum will discuss content development, the use of technology, and how best to reach parents, teachers and others with an interest in kids.us.

NTIA also plans to submit, and hopefully have published, articles promoting the availability of kids.us in child-friendly publications such as the Boy Scout’s “Boys Life” magazine, and within the Department of Justice’s “Parent’s Guide to Internet Safety.” NTIA has been in discussions with these and other groups about publishing kids.us information.

NTIA has maintained an excellent working relationship with NeuStar, which shares the goal of creating an attractive and robust kids.us as a haven for children on the Internet. NeuStar recently shared with NTIA what the company has done to inform potential content providers of the opportunities presented by the kids.us domain. NeuStar provided us with a detailed marketing program that includes plans for multi-media advertising, direct marketing, a registrar incentive program, and a new public relations campaign. NeuStar’s goal is to increase the number of registrations and to encourage registrants to post content for children. We were

pleased and encouraged by these plans and look forward to working with NeuStar on implementing these ideas.

The Administration believes that the success of the domain will come with a shared responsibility by all stakeholders. We witnessed widespread bipartisan support for the Dot Kids Act in Congress. I applaud the continued support for the kids.us space by Members of this Committee, especially Representatives Shimkus, Upton and Markey. Your continuous promotion of the site goes a long way toward bringing safe, child-friendly content to the site. We are hopeful that many companies will heed your call to develop additional content for the kids.us space.

The non-profit community deserves special recognition for being among the first to develop interesting content for the kids.us domain. Independent groups, such as Minnesota Kids, the St. Nicholas Center and Tubehead, have committed their limited budgets and staff to the creation and viability of their kids.us sites. We hope many more non-profits, government agencies, and companies will follow this lead.

Creating a safe and useful place on the Internet for our children is a necessary goal that deserves our best efforts. NTIA is prepared to work with the Congress and other stakeholders - - government, corporations, and non-profits - - to protect children as they explore the online world.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.