

EBSCO DATABASE STRATEGY

Utah Strategy Empowered Families Coalition (Worldwide Organization of Women and Family Watch International leading)

Thanks to the courageous Patersons from Colorado, we were able to discover that EBSCO is being used in Utah and have launched efforts to have it blocked. In order to assist other states in this effort, we submit the following as our strategy in the hopes that it may help you protect children in your state.

1. **Get educated** – We each took time to get educated on exactly WHO EBSCO is and how they operate. We had one primary researcher (let us all bless Karen Varner!) who did great research and then passed it on to each of us.
 - a. **A tremendous resource is National Center on Sexual Exploitation** - <https://endsexualexploitation.org/download/dirty-dozen-list-ebSCO/>
2. **Investigate** – Several member organizations in our coalition began to investigate EBSCO's activities in our state by doing the following:
 - a. **How is it being used?** We discovered ours was being distributed by a state organization called Utah Education Network (UEN). It was also being distributed by the Utah Online Library.
 - i. **Who is controlling distribution?** Ours is NOT distributed individually by each district but instead is statewide.
 - ii. **How is access granted?** Children/educators/staff are given username/password access. This is VERY easily obtained. The online library requires NONE of that to access but is open to all.
 - iii. **How is accessibility provided?** Many of our children have school-provided tablets or access to school located computers. However, students can also access this at home or in a public library.
 - b. **Is there harmful material?** We began an investigation with many volunteers using random searches to discover pornography. It was easily discovered. Some of the searches we used were “women”, “videogames”, “redbull”, “golden spike” (this is Utah ☺), etc.
 - i. We kept a log of the **searches** we used so we could document dates/searches/etc. and share with others.
 - ii. It was critical to take **screenshots** to document the results. EBSCO immediately began trying to scrub content when they heard what we were up to.
 - iii. It was important to only **share a few** of the searches we were using. We have not shared publicly the list of searches we have been using because we want to be able to monitor harmful materials and not allow EBSCO to selectively scrub content.
 - c. **Are minors being impacted?** We began to hear stories of children encountering pornography inadvertently (including the son of a state school board member). We began to **document** these stories to keep track of them. We also determined **how long** EBSCO has been contracting with the state of Utah (over 10 years).
3. **Rally the troops** – We held an organizational meeting with the members of our coalition and like-minded organizations and individuals to notify them of our findings and ask for their involvement.

4. **Sound the alarm** – Nicholeen Peck, the chairman of the Empowered Families Coalition (Utah) and the president of the Worldwide Organization of Women, contacted a sympathetic legislator who had passed a major anti-pornography bill in the past. Then we moved forward in sounding the alarm:
 - a. **Contact a sympathetic legislator** – he then helped spread the word
 - b. **Contact the governor's office**
 - c. **Contact sympathetic state school board members** – We have 3 who are helpful and they have jumped into the work – especially one. We have three more who have been helpful, just not as active.
 - d. **Contact friendly media** – Nicholeen was able to get a TV interview sounding the alarm.
 - e. **Contact religious entities** – In Utah, this means the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were stunned and immediately took action to block access in their universities. Other churches are getting the word as well.

5. **Demand action** – Each of these then have been pressing on the UEN (who distributes EBSCO statewide) to shut it down, which they did immediately.

6. **Keep up pressure** – So within a WEEK, the UEN met to reinstate access to K-12. They held a hearing and we showed up in large numbers. Speakers included messages of:
 - i. Teachers who are pro-family who reminded the UEN board that their #1 job is to keep children safe;
 - ii. Parent asking, “Who was supposed to be monitoring this and keeping our kids safe? They must be held accountable – and things must change.”
 - iii. Volunteer stating, “I could not believe what I was seeing with simple searches. And I wasn't searching sex-related terms—just regular words. It was sickening.”
 - iv. A technical person stated, “Even if EBSCO starts filtering, it will take a while to scrub all of their databases so things won't be cleaned up immediately.”
 - v. Volunteer stating, “We will give you the benefit that you did not know what was there but now you do. If you open this back up, you will be WILLFULLY and KNOWINGLY distributing pornography and obscene materials to minors and this violates the law. You would open to legal liability if you did this.”
 - vi. Mom stating, “I have adopted 3 children who have been sexually abused. One son had a pornography addiction that he had been able to control but when he went to school, it was all easily available and he got addicted again. These children have been exploited and victimized and they should not be triggered at school and what is supposed to be a safe database.”
 - vii. Volunteer stating, “EBSCO has been busted in several states and on the national stage by the Center to End Sexual Exploitation. They have KNOWN they have these materials in their databases and have NOT cleaned them up. They are not to be trusted.”

7. **Organize your forces:** We have organized a team to fight and recommend you do the same:
 - a. We have a **leader** – Nicholeen – who is the chairman of our coalition
 - b. We have included many **groups** who are as outraged as we are and they have joined in.
 - c. We have organized the **core team** to coordinate efforts together.
 - i. We've been meeting **weekly** either at a home, by conference call, or zoom video conferencing. Interestingly, the home meeting draws the most attendance.
 - ii. We set up a **Google folder** and have given access to the team with resource materials including:

- a. About EBSCO
- b. Explora
- c. Fighting EBSCO
- d. Gale
- e. Screenshots
- f. Stories/Experiences
- g. Who is using EBSCO
- h. UEN Board info
- i. Directory of Team

We put everything here so everyone can reach it immediately and we can update constantly.

8. Spread the word:

- a. We have used social media to spread the word publicly and through our organizations – as well as emails.
- b. We have been using media outlets as well – with mixed results. (Be careful on what reporters you trust.)
- c. Word of mouth
- d. Other coalitions – other meetings

9. Constant contact of those in decision-making status:

- a. The opposition has been very active (particularly librarians and teachers) – expect that.
- b. Their strategies include mostly MINIMIZING –
 - i. They call us “prudes” – we counter by asking if they’re OK having children see a picture of a woman being raped by a gun with 2 men watching . . . and more if needed.
 - ii. The biggest argument they use is “Well I’ve used it and I haven’t seen anything.” They use this a LOT. Just share screenshots, quotes from obscene materials, and the few NORMAL searches you use to find stuff. Rinse and repeat.
 - iii. They argue that it’s just a little porn. We counter with, “Would you eat brownies with a little bit of poop in them?” Ridiculous to ask our children to be exposed in a “safe” environment.
 - iv. They attack saying we’re organized radical conservatives – so the more grassroots you appear the better. And we just laughed.
 - v. They say they teach the kids digital literacy and they can handle it. Our response – our children are not responsible to clean up YOUR messes.
 - vi. They argue there’s porn everywhere – we counter with the fact that this is SCHOOL AUTHORIZED porn – a HUGE difference. Schools and libraries should be **safe spaces**
 - vii. They send many emails – so it’s crucial that we send **MORE emails** to all the decision makers. THANK them for shutting this down and encourage them to keep things shut.
 - viii. Members of our team are **monitoring** the various meetings – state school board, UEN, etc. to make sure we cover them all.

10. Legal approach:

- a. Our next steps are to contact the **Attorney General’s** office to ask them to investigate/prosecute.
- b. We’ve had our team do a **review of the current law** and noting violations:

- i. Look for the words “willfully and knowingly”, “obscenity”, “harmful to minors”, “pornography”
 - ii. Remember – the obscenity exemption that is in 43 states for education applies to things with SERIOUS LITERARY, ARTISTIC, OR SCIENTIFIC VALUE. Those are the buzzwords. This kind of porn does NOT have serious value so they can’t hide behind that exemption.
 - iii. Look also to the federal statutes that are violated (See the complaint described in “f” below)
 - iv. Look for statutes relative to viewing porn on school property – many states have that
- c. We’ll be doing a **legal summary** of all the potential violations
 - d. We’ll be **meeting** with the AG team to review next steps
 - e. We’re bringing along a state school board member who is helping – good to have a person with political standing go with you.
 - f. **We have been given a great gift – a lawsuit has been filed in Colorado against EBSCO and the state library system. READ IT THOROUGHLY – it has MANY great arguments you will want to use.**
 - i. **One of the key points is that they are asking for an injunction (that means to stop using EBSCO)– they are NOT asking that the schools/libraries not use any databases. Remember that. The opposition will try to say we’re all a pack of anti-techs. Say, no, we just don’t trust EBSCO.**
 - ii. We can use this complaint as a weapon and tell them that we may find ourselves in the same situation of having a lawsuit to enforce this.

11. Future steps:

- a. **We can tie this to removing the obscenity exemption by saying this loophole makes it possible for this kind of thing to happen.**
- b. We can pursue a lawsuit – maybe with the help of Thomas More Society.
- c. We are pursuing only K-12 at this point and will go after the libraries later. Two-pronged approach.
- d. **We are continually monitoring EBSCO but also the other databases – GALE, Explora, Summit, etc. We find the best is World Book – although they too access some EBSCO databases. CultureGram is squeaky clean from our analysis.**
- e. **More visibility – we’re talking to legislators – and this is freaking them out ;)**

So that’s where we are. So primary take-aways

- **Go straight to the top—don’t mess around with a single school district.**
- **Document everything – screenshots and stories have been invaluable.**
- **Be relentless – this is not a sprint but a marathon.**
- **It’s frightening how many children have been exposed—we find more daily. Know that THEY NEED US TO PROTECT THEM. THEY NEED YOU.**