13 September 2012

Dear [Name],

Thank you for contacting me regarding the protection of children from online adult content and for sharing your personal experiences of the issue.

I appreciate and share the serious concerns that many people hold about the proliferation of adult online content and the danger this poses to children. Indeed, 80% of people (and 93% of women) think that online child safety is a problem and only 30% of parents are aware that their children have seen adult material online.

I think it is important, therefore, that the Government works with Internet Service Providers (ISPs), parents and children's groups to find an appropriate and effective way to help protect children online. The previous Labour Government made it clear that it would give the industry the opportunity to tackle this problem on a voluntary basis but I am concerned that the industry remains resistant to this and that the 'active choice' policy - whereby ISPs offer new customers the opportunity to opt-out of adult online content - does not go far enough to address these concerns.

That is why I agree with a recent report by the cross-party Parliamentary Inquiry into Online Child Protection that it is sensible to require ISPs to introduce a system whereby the user would have to 'opt-in' to receive adult content. This kind of technology is already used by schools and while it would not eradicate the need for wider parental responsibility, I think that it could, as the NSPCC have emphasised, help provide better protection for children online.

I know that some people have expressed concern that this opt-in system would infringe civil liberties but adults would still have the choice to access whatever material they choose and I think it would strike an appropriate balance between internet freedom and child safety.
As you are aware, the Government has recently consulted with ISPs, technology companies and campaign groups on introducing new measures to protect children from inappropriate content. The consultation ended on the 6th September 2012 and I hope that the Government will take decisive action to better protect children online.

Thank you once again for writing to me and for sharing your views.

Yours sincerely,

 Thomas Docherty MP
 Dunfermline & West Fife