

# Utah calls pornography public health crisis, in US first

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Utah became the first US state Tuesday to formally declare pornography a public health crisis, in a move backed by Republicans, seeking to shield its citizens from an "epidemic" of addictive sexual content.

A major [adult entertainment](#) trade group dismissed the move as "noxious" and an "old-fashioned morals bill," but experts say it could open the door to other US states to follow suit.

"Pornography is a public health crisis. The problem is rampant, yet it thrives in secrecy and silence," said Gary Herbert, the Republican governor of predominantly Mormon Utah, after signing the resolution, which cites what it says are numerous detrimental effects of porn.

"Today's bills will start an open discussion, bringing its very real dangers to light," he said in a statement.

The state legislature approved the text earlier this year, calling for "the need for education, prevention, research and policy change at the community and societal level in order to address the pornography epidemic that is harming the citizens of Utah and the nation."

"We realize this is a bold assertion and there are some out there who will disagree with us. We're here to say it is, in fact, the full-fledged truth," Herbert said during a signing ceremony.

"We also want our young people to know that there's a particularly

psychological and physiological detriment that comes from addiction to pornography."

Republican state senator Todd Weiler, who sponsored the bill, also defended the measure, saying "we're not spending money and we're not banning anything."

Instead, the resolution calls for people in Utah to cooperate in curtailing the consumption of pornographic material, in moves backed by several local groups including the Utah Coalition Against Pornography.

The Free Speech Coalition, a trade association for the [adult entertainment industry](#), lashed out at the move.

"The claims and the implied proscriptions harken to the dark days before adult film was legal, and when sex and sexuality were only discussed behind closed doors, if at all," it said.

Harvard Business School professor Benjamin Edelman released a study in 2009 that identified Utah as the US state with the highest rate of people with online adult entertainment subscriptions, angering some in the state.

Weiler said there was a grave danger of a generation of children growing up with "despicable" pornographic images on their screens.

"I think most people today know that if they start using something like heroin or meth, they know that they have a risk of becoming addicted to it, but some people don't know that about pornography," he told ABC News.

The governor also enacted a law requiring computer technicians to report to law enforcement any child [pornography](#) found while working on a

machine.

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