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| 3 | IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE ELEVENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS |
| 4 | ONTIED STATES COOK! OF ATTEADS |
| 5 | MH, |
| 6 | Appellant, |
| 7 | Docket No. 22-10338 v. |
| 8 | OMEGLE.COM LLC, |
| 9 | Appellee, |
| 11 | Proceedings in the Above-Titled Matter: |
| L3 L4 L5 | <u>Location</u> : Montgomery, Alabama |
| L6 L7 | <pre>Date: November 17, 2022</pre> |
| L8 L9 | |
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| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2022; |
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| 4 | JUDGE LAGOA: Let everyone settle |
| 5 | settle in. |
| 6 | MR. MARSH: Thank you, Your Honor. |
| 7 | JUDGE LAGOA: Good morning. We're here on |
| 8 | the third case on the calendar, MH, JH versus |
| 9 | Omeglecom.LLC. |
| 10 | You ready to proceed, Counsel? |
| 11 | MR. MARSH: Yes, I am, your Honor. |
| 12 | JUDGE LAGOA: Thank you. |
| 13 | MR. MARSH: Good morning, Your Honor. May |
| 14 | it please the Court. Before beginning today I'd like |
| 15 | to acknowledge the contributions of my co-counsel in |
| 16 | this case, Margaret Mabie and Hillary Napi who are at |
| 17 | counsel table. |
| 18 | The limited immunity provided by section |
| 19 | 230 should not be construed as absolute immunity. The |
| 20 | defendant in this case, Omegle, is a virtual boom boom |
| 21 | room, an online den of degradation. That's from a |
| 22 | case that was written by Judge Carnes, United States |
| 23 | versus Mosey. And that case involved an apt analogy |
| 24 | to what we're seeing in this case, where Mr. Mosey was |
| 25 | a businessman. But in reality he was a pimp who |



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created the boom boom room where he would invite young teenage girls in to meet with men to have sex. That case Mr. Mosey was prosecuted. It was not the girls. It was not the purchasers. It was the person that facilitated the sexual abuse of these girls.

You're going to hear a lot today about third-party content; right? What is third-party content? In the analogy of the boom boom room, the third-party content would be the content created by my client, an 11-year-old girl in her bedroom invited to meet new friends by talking to strangers on the Omegle website. She was extorted with information that was provided by Omegle concerning her geolocation. She was coerced to produce child pornography on a website that knows cappers capture that sexual abuse that's being committed.

And Omegle itself has known for a long time that its site is being used to produce child pornography. This is about production. This is a narrow case about production. It is not about third-party content. It is categorically outside the scope of section 230 immunity because no third-party content is involved. You cannot engage in criminal activity and cloak it in a website. The abuse our



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11-year-old client suffered, it was preventable, predictable, and only occurred because Omegle created a venue which enabled, encouraged, and enticed children to meet strangers online.

The laws prohibiting child pornography, which is commonly now referred to as CSAM, child sex abuse materials, although the law still reflects -- yes, Judge Carnes.

Let me ask you something. JUDGE CARNES: I'm not (inaudible) argumentatively. I usually don't let just -- here's the problem I have. I hope you'll help me with it. The fact that the manufacturers of automobiles (inaudible) can be misused in criminal enterprises and that the manufacturers of automobiles know that a certain percentage of them are being misused in criminal enterprises, you wouldn't suggest that they are liable for anything on the misuse of their product or their services. So how do you distinguish that category -- and an automobile manufacturer is not the best example -- but that category of instruments that can be misused can be used for valuable purposes and beneficial purposes and certainly legitimate purposes. How is that different?



That's a very good question,

MR. MARSH:

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Judge Carnes. And I would analogize that to a situation of perhaps a bus company, right, producing a party bus that said, "Come on the bus and meet strangers. Come on the bus and meet men" like in the boom boom room. You know, it wasn't a bar. It wasn't a -- you know, a movie theatre. It was a venue that was designed to link people together that should not be put together. So it is -- we hear a lot about neutral tools; right? Wasn't this a neutral tool?

JUDGE CARNES: Let me stop -- stop you there. It was designed to link people together who

Was it -- you can't say it was designed only -- to link only people who shouldn't have been linked.

shouldn't have been linked together.

MR. MARSH: That's correct.

JUDGE CARNES: In other words, it links people who -- without making moral judgments that aren't enforced in the law -- it puts people together who we can't say aren't -- shouldn't be put together. That's for them to decide.

MR. MARSH: Well, yes your Honor. But with all due respect, the "them" in this case are children. And there is no age verification on this



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JUDGE CARNES: Counsel, some of the "them" are children. You've never alleged that the only people who were put together with other people in this enterprise, let's call it, are children.

MR. MARSH: That's correct, your Honor, and that --

JUDGE CARNES: There are some adults and to the extent that their behavior can't be constitutionally prohibited, adult-on-adult behavior, then you can't say that this is an enterprise that was only designed to violate the law and exploit children.

MR. MARSH: Well, your Honor, that gets to the knowing component of the FOSTA exception. And we are -- to be clear, we are pre-discovery in this case. We do not know why this site was created. We do not know the knowledge of the corporation that created this site.

JUDGE LAGOA: Because the issue here is whether or not immunity applies.

MR. MARSH: That is --

JUDGE LAGOA: This was stopped at the immunity stage.

MR. MARSH: That is correct, your Honor.



| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | JUDGE LAGOA: So the true question here |
| 3 | is, is there immunity. |
| 4 | JUDGE CARNES: Based on the allegations in |
| 5 | the complaint. |
| 6 | MR. MARSH: Well, their immunity is |
| 7 | statutory, but there are statutory exceptions to that |
| 8 | immunity. The Court could find that this this |
| 9 | website this behavior that was occurring on this |
| 10 | website is outside section 230. What I hear you |
| 11 | saying, Judge Carnes, is that you you are |
| 12 | believe that that is a dubious distinction. But there |
| 13 | is an exception to section 230. |
| 14 | JUDGE CARNES: I'm not saying that at all. |
| 15 | I'm asking questions that go to your case. |
| 16 | MR. MARSH: Well, then we need to look at |
| 17 | go ahead, Judge. |
| 18 | JUDGE CARNES: No. You go. |
| 19 | MR. MARSH: We are then turn to section |
| 20 | 18 USC 1591 which is a FOSTA carve out. This is |
| 21 | passed by Congress with the intention of addressing |
| 22 | some of this behavior that is occurring on this |
| 23 | website and it is |
| 24 | JUDGE LAGOA: Counsel, was it 18591? |
| 25 | MR. MARSH: Sorry, your Honor. 18 USC, |



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC 2 1-5-9-1, 1591 --3 JUDGE LAGOA: Okay. Thank you. MR. MARSH: -- which is commonly known as 4 5 the FOSTA -- I don't even remember what it stands for 6 anymore -- but the FOSTA, F-O-S-T-A, carve out. 7 JUDGE BRASHER: So this is what that 8 language says in the carve out. It says "Nothing in 9 this section shall be construed to impair or limit any claim in a civil action brought under section 1595, 10 which is the civil action, if the conduct underlying 11 12 the claim constitutes a violation of section 1591 of 13 that statute." 1591 is the criminal liability 14 section. 15 MR. MARSH: Correct. That's the criminal 16 predicate, your Honor. 17 JUDGE BRASHER: So why don't your allegations have to establish criminal conduct on the 18 19 part of Omegle -- first question. And then if they do have to establish that, have you actually established 2.0 21 that in your allegations in your complaint? 22 MR. MARSH: Okay. That's a very good 2.3 So these statutes are cumbersome at best. question. 24 It's taken me quite a while to appreciate all the



So 1591 is the criminal

nuances of these statutes.

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predicate as you -- as you recognize, and 1595 is the civil remedy as you recognize. With 1595 has been interpreted one of the challenges of looking at these two statutes together is how you interpret 1595's knew or should have known civil standard onto 1591, which is why I'm sort of starting with 1591 to show that we don't need to have a lesser standard in this case because we have the actual knowing of 1591. So we don't need the -- we don't need the beneficiary liability.

JUDGE BRASHER: So you think your allegations are sufficient to establish actual knowledge under 1591?

MR. MARSH: That's correct, your Honor. That's exactly what I'm arguing in terms of the statutory construction of 1591. Now, unfortunately, we don't have many hours to go over all the nuances here, but there is an A1, an A2 of 1591 which establishes the knowing conduct of the website. A1 talks about recruiting, enticing, obtaining, or soliciting; right?

And Judge Carnes, with all due respect, that's what differentiates this case from the automobile case because we do have proof of



| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | recruiting, enticing, you know, talk to strangers, |
| 3 | meet strangers online that is enticing |
| 4 | obtaining, and soliciting. So that's you can |
| 5 | find |
| 6 | JUDGE CARNES: It doesn't say "If you're a |
| 7 | child, talk to strangers online" |
| 8 | MR. MARSH: That's correct. |
| 9 | JUDGE CARNES: or "Talk to strange |
| 0 | children online" |
| 1 | MR. MARSH: And that's why you have |
| _2 | these |
| 13 | JUDGE CARNES: anymore than it says "If |
| 4 | you're planning a robbery, buy an automobile. You can |
| 15 | get away faster" (inaudible). |
| . 6 | MR. MARSH: Well, then let's then your |
| _7 | Honor, let's talk about A2, which discusses reckless |
| 8 | disregard. Now, this Court's precedence on reckless |
| _9 | disregards with regard to sex crimes is very solid. |
| 20 | That is the not only the Mosey case, your Honor, |
| 21 | which you which you wrote, but also the Daniels and |
| 22 | the Pruitt case. And those cases were criminal cases. |
| 23 | And in those criminal cases this Court found that the |
| 24 | protection of the very young calls for a contextual |
| 25 | approach to statutory interpretation; right? That's |



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the United States versus Daniels. Given the congressional intent to protect the most vulnerable among us, that's why these statutes were passed. principle has been applied repeatedly. In the Daniels case, to federal statutory rape laws, which provide an apt comparison here, child sex trafficking prohibited by 1591, in particular, child sex trafficking, your Honor, expressed congressional recognition that young children need special protection against sexual That is this Court's decision in the exploitation. United States versus Daniel. And then in the Ruggiero case talks about age verification as a component of the federal regulatory scheme in the criminal context when it comes to the production of child pornography. So with 1591, that is aimed specifically at this conduct of child trafficking. That's why it was written and that's why it should apply in this case. And the -- and again, to parse all of these various components would take longer than I have, 42 seconds. But suffice it to say that there is a specific carve out, A2, for persons who have not obtained the age of 18 years and will be cause to engage in a commercial sex act, which the production of child pornography clearly is.



| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | JUDGE LAGOA: Can I ask you a question? |
| 3 | MR. MARSH: Yes, your Honor. |
| 4 | JUDGE LAGOA: Because I guess on the |
| 5 | record it or the implication is that they don't ask |
| 6 | for the age. But my understanding is the website |
| 7 | itself, I guess, I don't know if it's an algorithm, |
| 8 | but it matches users randomly, but sometimes it also |
| 9 | pairs people based on similarities. |
| 10 | MR. MARSH: Correct. You can enter key |
| 11 | words, if you will, your Honor, of the kinds of people |
| 12 | and content you want to access. |
| 13 | JUDGE LAGOA: So it's not necessarily the |
| 14 | Omegle is that how you pronounce it? |
| 15 | MR. MARSH: That is how we pronounce it. |
| 16 | JUDGE LAGOA: Omegle is actively involved |
| 17 | in sometimes linking the users together? |
| 18 | MR. MARSH: Correct. And they are also |
| 19 | actively involved in revealing the geolocation of the |
| 20 | individuals on the other side of the screen. We don't |
| 21 | know if this is a feature, if this is a data leak. |
| 22 | But we do know that Omegle is aware of this because it |
| 23 | is frequently talked about by pedophiles and child |
| 24 | molesters as a way that they can identify the users, |
| 25 | the children on the other side. And in this case |



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basically extort them with that information to provide this kind of content to them, this kind of illegal content that's prohibited by the First Amendment.

JUDGE BRASHER: Can I ask -- can I ask a follow-up question? So what -- so I see some allegations in your complaint where you've alleged sort of generally that Omegle knew. So like paragraph 84, for example, "Defendant knowingly benefited from a participation venture in which defendant knew CH would be forced to engage in commercial sex."

What are the factual allegations that you make in the complaint that back up that sort of blanket allegation?

MR. MARSH: Yes, your Honor. That's a Omegle itself has been involved in good question. criminal investigations for this exact kind of They have been subpoenaed. content. They appear in the case records. They appear in the reported decisions as an entity because this content is illegal and beyond First Amendment protection. And Omegle has been contacted in those cases with similar behavior. So we have to assume that because of this information that they are aware that this activity is occurring on their website.



1 MH v. OMEGIE.COM LIC 2 So you're assuming in the JUDGE LAGOA: 3 complaint knowledge based on criminal actions that involve their website? 4 5 MR. MARSH: That's correct. Not as them 6 as defendants to be clear, your Honor but --7 JUDGE LAGOA: I understand that. But 8 they've been contacted or subpoenaed or ... 9 MR. MARSH: Yes. JUDGE BRASHER: Yeah. That seems like a 10 11 -- I mean, that seems -- I want you to tell me why 12 it's not problematic, but it seems problematic because 13 when I wrote this decision in Red Roof Inns that talks 14 about should have known versus known, and in that 15 decision we say, look, this is about hotels. You know, the fact that your hotels are used by sex 16 17 traffickers, the fact that you might have -- you know, you might reasonably expect that people are going to 18 19 sex-traffic in your hotel; that's not the same as saying that you knowingly participate in a venture 2.0 21 involving sex trafficking. So how is that -- how is 22 your reading of your complaint consistent with Red Roof Inns? 2.3 24 MR. MARSH: That's another good question, 25 your Honor. So --



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC JUDGE BRASHER: I only ask good questions. 2 3 From here on out, just assume all the questions are 4 good. 5 Especially when I'm over time MR. MARSH: 6 and I want to sit down. 7 JUDGE LAGOA: It's fine. This is an important issue, so we'll go over time. 8 But don't 9 tell him any more "Good question." It's going to go to his head. 10 11 MR. MARSH: I'll do my best, your Honor. 12 Thank you. 13 There has been a lot of analogies between 14 the virtual world and the physical world, the Red Roof 15 Inn world. And I think that the distinguishing factor in that case, in those cases, is it's -- what we don't 16 know about this site, your Honor, is why it was 17 18 created, what their actual knowledge is as we do in the Red Roof cases; right? 19 Those are pretty clear. The role of the hotels, the franchisers -- and some 2.0 21 cases have found liability for hotels in those cases. 22 In this case we have not even gotten to that level of



We do know that they screen capture, that

discovery to know, you know, precisely what this --

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this site knows.

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they monitor some of these chats. We do know that any textual chats are -- are -- are maintained by the company and you can retrieve the text part of it. But we don't know, in fact, why this site was created. It does -- you know, the boom boom room could have been a -- could have been a bar and grill for all I know. But we do know what was going on there.

And so it isn't analogous, but again, at this stage when we haven't even had discovery to -- to -- to divine all of the knowledge and the intent and the participation and how the algorithm works in this product to link, you know, children with adult sex offenders -- we don't know beyond that veil. And that is the challenge we have with section 230. And that's why these carve outs are so important, that we can make a good faith argument that they had knowledge. They are revealing this information that's being used to sextort children, that this itself is in violation Although it doesn't have a cause of action, of COPPA. it does set a standard of care for children under 13. Our client was clearly under 13 years of age. whether or not it's more like a hotel or more like an auto industry or more like the boom boom room is something that we would need further discovery to



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC 2 determine. 3 We do know recently that even the United Nations has called this site into question for the --4 5 for the activities that are going on there. 6 widely known that almost every image that you click 7 through is someone masturbating or a penis or some sexual content. So it's not as neutral as it seems 8 9 when you actually look at how the site functions and what is occurring there. I know that probably doesn't 10 11 answer your entire question but... 12 JUDGE BRASHER: Thank you. 13 MR. MARSH: I'm happy to answer any 14 further questions. And I have time reserved so... 15 JUDGE LAGOA: Yes. You will. You'll get 16 your full time. Thank you very much.

MR. MARSH: Great. Thank you, your Honor.

MS. GUNNING: Good morning.

JUDGE LAGOA: Good morning.

MS. GUNNING: May it please the Court.

21 Kimberlee Gunning for the appellee Omegle.com LLC.

Language sets limits. And in this case there are

three categories of limits that the Court must

24 consider.

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25 First of all, the Court is confined -- the



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Court is limited by the actual allegations and claims in the Plaintiff's second amended complaint. Second, the Court's consideration is limited by the actual issues that the appellant raised on appeal, which are one, is the section 2252A claim exempt from section 230? And two, whether an actual knowledge or constructive knowledge standard applies to the section 1591 claim. Those are the only issues raised on appeal. I want to -- and the third limit is, the limits in section 230's plain language, which considering all of the exemptions the appellants have raised, it's clear based on the language that none of those exemptions apply.

I want to talk first about the exemption in section 230 Cl. And this is the exemption, "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." And what that means is, it applies to —that type of immunity applies to any cause of action that makes a service provider like Omegle liable for content originating with a third-party user.

Now, an exception to that is situations where the platform or the ICS materially contributes



to the content. And that's not the case here. This is about the content created by the John Doe who criminally misappropriated the site. It's about his words to CH --

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JUDGE LAGOA: But how -- but for example, it has -- there is no -- there's an exception to sexual exploitation of children. Let's just talk about that. So if you -- if in discovery you could prove that your client or someone who is involved in the company knew or knows or willingly participated or received money as a result of sexual exploitation of children, would you agree that that would be part of the exception and that would be -- that you would not have immunity for that?

MS. GUNNING: Well, with respect to the 1591 claim, your Honor, it's an actual knowledge standard, and so the -- the appellant would -- the plaintiff would have to show that there was -- that Omegle had actual knowledge as to the plaintiff.

JUDGE LAGOA: All right. But the district court judge here treated it as a -- basically a full immunity when the statute has exceptions. And in order to show knowledge, you're going to have to have some level of discovery. I mean, you're not making



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC 2 the suggestion that a complaint that is a notice 3 pleading has to have any and all facts in order to survive. 4 5 MS. GUNNING: Well, your Honor, there's 6 nothing in the statute, section 230, or the statutes 7 that underlie the two claims on appeal here that indicates that these type of cases are exempt from the 8 9 requirements of Igbal Twombly. In this case this is the second amended complaint. 10 The plaintiffs had 11 multiple opportunities to amend their complaint. 12 JUDGE LAGOA: Were they allowed to do 13 discovery? 14 MS. GUNNING: No, your Honor. They were 15 not allowed to do discovery, but they are situations, hypothetical facts, and some of which have arisen in 16 other cases where it was possible. 17 Well, I quess, going 18 JUDGE LAGOA: 19 forward, if someone now brought a lawsuit, they can claim now that you have knowledge; correct? 2.0 21 I'm sorry, your Honor? MS. GUNNING: 22 JUDGE LAGOA: That the company now has 2.3 knowledge that it's being used as a child pornography 24 website? 25 MS. GUNNING: The issue, your Honor, with



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respect to the claims here is whether Omegle had particular knowledge as to the plaintiffs, and that's in Judge Brasher's decision in Red Roof, which he mentioned in questioning of the appellant. So even if you're outside of section 230, and even if the FOSTA exception doesn't apply, and even if platforms were subject to the same standards as the hotels, there still has to be that violation, knowing -- knowing or should have known that there was a violation as to the plaintiff.

JUDGE BRASHER: Right. It's not -- the knowledge required by the statute is not knowledge that someone else is using your stuff to do something; right? It's knowing participation in a venture that involves sex trafficking; right?

MS. GUNNING: That's correct.

JUDGE BRASHER: So the mere fact that you know that someone else is doing something -- I mean, I don't know if this is -- that's not the kind of knowledge that the statute talks about.

MS. GUNNING: That's correct, your Honor. It's not -- it's not --

JUDGE BRASHER: Now, maybe you should have known that someone -- you know, like I know that there



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC are people who tend to use my hotel for whatever --2 3 maybe I should know that -- that they're doing that. That's a should-have standard, but that doesn't meet 4 the do know, actual -- actual knowledge. 5 6 MS. GUNNING: That's correct. I mean, 7 again, if this were outside section 230, the Red Roof standard, applying that, clearly there hasn't been 8 9 shown the type of particularized knowledge. However, FOSTA does --10 11 JUDGE CARNES: Let me ask you this 12 question, Counsel. 13 MS. GUNNING: Yes. 14 JUDGE CARNES: So your position is that if 15 your clients give 1,000 children for being sexually abused or trafficked (inaudible) you're using the 16 site, but they didn't know the identity, had no idea 17 18 which children it was, where they were located, so 19 forth, so on, they'd be absolutely immune and could continue at the rate of a thousand a year with perfect 2.0 21 immunity. 22 Is that (inaudible)? 2.3 MS. GUNNING: Based on the claims in this 24 case and based on the allegations, yes. There would



be immunity because knowledge of other incidents that

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allegedly occur, other bad actors who criminally

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misappropriate a platform is simply not enough to -
JUDGE CARNES: (Inaudible) they did a

study, internal study, top secret, confidential, don't

share, but it got shared. And it showed that 95

percent of the children who went on the website were

abused in one form or another, and that X number of

children are abused every year. And that wouldn't

matter? Your clients would be absolutely immune so

long as they said, "No, no. Don't tell me. I don't

want to know their names. I don't want to know their

geolocation. Let's take that (inaudible)."

MS. GUNNING: Your Honor, under -- again, under the claims at issue here, that generalized knowledge standard or non-particularized knowledge, yes. The immunity would apply and --

JUDGE CARNES: What claims -- what claims would the immunity not apply to? I'm trying to see if your clients that have the most malevolent of hearts could continue doing this with full immunity knowing that they were causing or participating in causing a thousand children a year to be sexually abused and trafficked so long as they didn't know the names and addresses or geolocation of the child.



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC Well, your Honor, if there 2 MS. GUNNING: 3 were not -- if there was not a claim that implicated FOSTA or not a claim that implicated section 22 --4 5 excuse me -- 2252A, then we would go to that general 6 exemption under C1, which is, here is unlawful content 7 that is created by bad actors who are misappropriating 8 the site. It's not content that Omegle is materially 9 contributing to. 10 JUDGE CARNES: So your answer is, yes, 11 they would be immune. 12 MS. GUNNING: They would --(Inaudible) as long they 13 JUDGE CARNES: 14 wanted to a thousand children (inaudible) a year. 15 That's your position? Under the current law and 16 MS. GUNNING: 17 under these claims, yes, they would be immune. JUDGE LAGOA: So what is the basis -- or 18 19 what is the reason then for having section E1, "No effect on criminal law, nothing in this section shall 2.0 be construed to impair the enforcement of section 223 21 22 or 231 of this title chapter 71 or title 18 or any other federal criminal statute"? 2.3



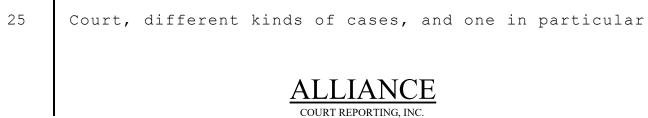
exemption for criminal prosecution. It's not an

MS. GUNNING: Well, section E1 is an

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| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | exemption for civil claims, your Honor. |
| 3 | JUDGE CARNES: Let me follow up with my |
| 4 | question. |
| 5 | You understand, of course, that there is |
| 6 | an exemption (inaudible) statutory interpretation to |
| 7 | statutory interpretation (inaudible). |
| 8 | MS. GUNNING: I'm sorry, your Honor. I |
| 9 | missed the last part of that question. |
| 10 | JUDGE CARNES: You know there's an |
| 11 | absurdity exception or doctrine or principle in |
| 12 | statutory interpretation that says even if we would |
| 13 | ordinarily read a statute to mean something, even as |
| 14 | plain words mean something, if it is absurd, and so |
| 15 | absurd it couldn't possibly have been intended, we |
| 16 | won't read it that way (inaudible). |
| 17 | MS. GUNNING: There is an absurdity |
| 18 | exception to the plain language rule. |
| 19 | JUDGE CARNES: You don't think it would be |
| 20 | absurd to interpret this statute to permit the kind of |
| 21 | wholesale existential exploitation of children |
| 22 | (inaudible)? |
| 23 | MS. GUNNING: Your Honor, I would actually |
| 24 | point to some recent decisions of the US Supreme |



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which is the Henson case, Henson versus Santander, which is considered a remedial statute. In that case the FDCPA, a statute that was enacted to protect a particular group of folks, consumers with household debt, and prohibited certain types of unlawful practices. And in that case Justice Gorsuch still said we have to apply the law faithfully as written. It's also similar to the Supreme Court's decision in Rodriguez where the Court said it frustrates rather than effectuates legislative intent simplistically to assume that whatever furthers the statute's primary objective must be the law.

JUDGE BRASHER: So you -- but I mean, just to get us back to the -- I mean, the allegations here are not that the site is used 95 percent of the time to traffic children; right? That's not the allegation here?

MS. GUNNING: That's not the allegations in this case.

JUDGE BRASHER: Okay. So -- and you agree -- I mean, I think you agree with this. There is an exception to 230 for liability under section 18 USC 1591; right?

MS. GUNNING: Correct.



MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC JUDGE BRASHER: So if there's criminal conduct that violates 18 US C 1591, that is not covered by section 230.

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MS. GUNNING: Yes. If the conduct underlying the claim -- if the defendant's conduct constitutes a violation of section 1591, yes, that exception --

JUDGE BRASHER: Right.

MS. GUNNING: -- exemption does not apply, but you could still go to -- to other exemptions.

JUDGE CARNES: What it means is if the defendant, your client, engaged in a crime under 1591 -- if your client -- I'm sorry -- under the underlying criminal statute, your client can also face civil liability unless you come up with some other defense. But it doesn't mean if there was being shown on the website criminal behavior by someone else who posted it on the website that there's an exception to civil liability for your client; right?

MS. GUNNING: If I'm understanding your Honor's question correctly, yes, I mean, the exemption in -- FOSTA's exemption in E5A, it is the defendant's own conduct that has to violate the criminal statute. And actually recently -- very recently -- we submitted



MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC 1 2 this as supplemental authority to the Court. The 9th 3 Circuit became the first circuit court of appeals to rule on these questions and found that, yes, indeed, 4 5 the actual knowledge standard, in other words, applying the standard applicable to a criminal -- a 6 7 violation of the statute -- a criminal violation of the statute applied in that instance. 8 9 JUDGE BRASHER: Right. So let's -- so let's talk about then -- I think we're all kind of on 10 11 the same page. 12 So do the allegations in the complaint --13 so this is the text of 1591. Do the allegations in the complaint establish or sufficiently allege for 14 15 purposes of plausibility under Twombly Iqbal that Omegle, quote, "Knowingly benefits financially or by 16 17 receiving anything of value from participation in a venture which has engaged in an act of sex 18 19 trafficking." 2.0 MS. GUNNING: No. 21 JUDGE BRASHER: Okay. Explain why that 22 would be. Well, there's --2.3 MS. GUNNING: 24 I'm sorry. Answer the JUDGE LAGOA: 25 question, and then I'll ask my question.



MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC MS. GUNNING: Well, there's r

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MS. GUNNING: Well, there's no -- there's no allegations of a knowing benefit. There's no allegations to support a common undertaking. And most importantly --

JUDGE LAGOA: Don't they allege that the individuals who are cappers or pedophiles pay for the service and that you receive -- your client receives money in order for them to use the service?

MS. GUNNING: Not exactly, your Honor.

There's no payment for using Omegle's service. It's a free site. I do understand that they alleged in the complaint that there was a financial benefit, but not related to any payment to use the site. Now, with respect to knowledge that is not alleged --

JUDGE LAGOA: Am I not supposed to accept that allegation as true?

MS. GUNNING: You can accept the allegation as true. It just -- it's not -- it's not payment from users of the site. I believe they allege that there's advertising on the site, but not a pay for use.

JUDGE LAGOA: Correct. So advertisers pay in order -- because you have a certain amount of users that use the site.



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC 2 That's the allegation, yes. MS. GUNNING: 3 JUDGE LAGOA: And they use the site for That's the allegations in --4 pornography of children? 5 MS. GUNNING: I don't believe advertisers 6 are using the site, your Honor. 7 JUDGE LAGOA: The users. But the advertisers pay for the amount of users that you have 8 9 trafficking and using the website. That's how you get 10 revenue. 11 MS. GUNNING: That's the allegation in the 12 complaint, your Honor. But I want to go back to this 13 -- the earlier question, which is -- goes to the level 14 of knowledge that the appellant has to show to show 15 Omegle violated the statute. And again, the most important thing I would go back to Red Roof, Judge 16 17 Brasher, where you explained that there had to be this knowledge by -- by the defendant that the TVPRA was 18 19 violated as to the plaintiff. Omegle had no 2.0 contemporaneous knowledge of the plaintiff, no contemporaneous knowledge of the John Doe. 21 This 22 isn't --2.3 JUDGE BRASHER: Well, you're saying that. But I mean, so -- I mean, we're stuck with the 24 25 allegations of the complaint and I mean, the 84 --



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paragraphs 84 through 87 of the complaint are things that I'm having trouble with because they say things like, quote, "Defendant knowingly benefited from and/or received value from participation in the venture in which Defendant knew CH would be forced to engage in commercial sexual acts while under the age of 18 years old." That's paragraph 84. Paragraph 87 says "Defendant knowingly benefited financially from the sex trafficking venture and the exploitation of CH."

So what do we do with allegations in the complaint that just literally say we meet the standards of 1591?

MS. GUNNING: Well, respectfully, your
Honor -- and I do not have the complaint in front of
me -- I believe that those are the allegations in the
cause of action themselves, not the underlying
allegations that explain how those elements of the
claim are met. And there are some -- there are some
allegations that -- and this was added after the
district court judge dismissed the First Amendment
complaint for shotgun pleading, adding those specific
allegations. But looking at those they don't map on
to the allegations in the cause of action. They don't



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flesh that out. I do see that I've gone over my time.

I'm happy to answer additional questions if the Court
has anv.

JUDGE LAGOA: Thank you very much.

MS. GUNNING: Thank you.

JUDGE BRASHER: All right. So let me -I'll just -- the question I'm having in this case is,
I think -- you make a lot of arguments in your brief
about the way section 230 should be interpreted and
the way 1595 and 1591 work together. But I think if
we get to the point where you have to allege that
Omegle committed a crime under 1591, the question I
have is, have you alleged in your complaint that
Omegle committed a crime under 1591?

MR. MARSH: Well it's a good question, your Honor. And I think if we -- in relation to the Rule 8 issue and the knowledge issue, this Court's precedents in United States versus Pruitt is instructive. And that is, again, another criminal case. It's not a civil case. These are all criminal cases with a much higher standard. It says "According to the circuit's well-established precedent, courts will address knowing receipt" -- and again, this is a child pornography case -- "mainly as issues of fact,



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not as law," which goes to your issue, Judge Lagoa, about gaining access to this information, which will allow us to prove all of these knowing elements. We are at the pleading stage.

And again, this is not a case about household debt. I know the defendant would like it to be. This is about the sexual exploitation of children. That is beyond First Amendment protection. There was a very good district court decision in this district recently which -- which talks about that, the Freesites case, and this is a higher -- a heightened standard of protection that we want to give to children that don't apply to consumers of household debt.

And the Daniels case is also instructive as to this knowing issue. And it says "Although there's a general presumption that knowing mens rea applies to every element in a statute," -- again, a criminal case -- "cases concerned with the protection of minors are within a special context" -- that's black letter law in this district -- "where that presumption is rebutted." A very, very strong preference for the protection of children.

This -- and if we want to get into



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statutory interpretation, which we haven't here today, this CDA was passed, the Communications Decency Act --well, there's nothing decent about what happened here -- as a child protection statute. That was the intent of Congress in passing this law, originally. This is before FOSTA.

JUDGE BRASHER: Yeah. Because, I mean, originally 230 was read to apply to Backpage and stuff like that where there was knowing participation in the sex trafficking venture; right? So, you know, Backpage.com knew --

MR. MARSH: Correct.

JUDGE BRASHER: -- that sex traffickers were advertising, encouraged sex traffickers to advertise, participated in the venture. I guess my point, once again, is where are the allegations in this complaint that suggests Omegle has done something like Backpage did and effectively committed a federal crime?

MR. MARSH: Well, this is what we have alleged in our complaint, which I do have a copy of, and I do have sites too. So we allege in paragraph 4 that Omegle knowingly received value. All right.

That is a conclusory statement. But it also talks



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about the presence of these individuals called "cappers," these people that in effect screen capture the abuse. They brand it with Omegle, which is ubiquitous on TikTok. You can Google Omegle on TikTok, search for Omegle on TikTok, and find all these child sex abuse videos that are branded "Omegle" by these cappers. That is paragraph 4.

In paragraph 31, we do allege that the defendants benefit financially, received something of value, including increased web traffic. I assume thev aren't running this site for free. I assume this is not a public good that they've created. Increased web traffic from participation in one or more sex trafficking ventures allowing Omegle.com to become a safe haven and refuge for child predators, sex abusers, human traffickers, and child pornographers. Paragraph 32, again, as to their knowledge, Omegle is a focus topic of discussion by child predators and child pornographers who trade and disseminate child sex abuse material, capping how-tos, how to exploit children on the site. Again, that goes to my criminal cases, Judge Lagoa, that I referenced in terms of their knowledge, the UN report, which is not included in our complaint, but we subsequently learned about



MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC

it, and we'll include it as supplemental authority, tips for how to create and produce child sex abuse videos on Omegle, advice on how to share and distribute child sex abuse materials with impunity, and other perverse pursuits.

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Paragraph 34 talks about how the Omegle site works and the involvement with -- with different key words that you can utilize to target children or to match these two individuals together.

Paragraph 39, paragraph 40 -- it's all in the record, your Honor. I'm not going to belabor this. Paragraph 41, Judge Lagoa, talks about the criminal cases that Omegle has been implicated in.

And again, we are -- to the -- to the Rule 8 issue, we should not be subjected to a heightened standard of pleading here. We're not alleging fraud or any of the things that would require a heightened pleading standard.

And so again, if we -- if we go back to the purpose, the congressional purpose, the way that this law has been misinterpreted -- the genesis of where we are today goes back to cases that were decided during dial up, you know, AOL. And like I experienced in my case before the Supreme Court on



1 MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC 2 restitution, you know, once the district courts start 3 in this direction, we unfortunately get a lot of bad precedents that really twisted the congressional 4 5 intent of the Communications Decency Act as a child 6 protection statute into something that we are now 7 arquing, as Judge Carnes recognizes, that we could have thousands and thousands of children and which 8 9 Defendant posits that they still have absolute 10 immunity. 11 JUDGE BRASHER: But I think they're wrong 12 about that because that seems like Backpage.com, which 13 clearly -- maybe not dot com, Back page in paper. MR. MARSH: And then it became dot com. 14 15 So... Clearly, clearly, 16 JUDGE BRASHER: Yeah. 17 the thing that Congress was trying to get at by 18 creating this exception -- I just go back to the 19 question of, have you alleged -- do you think you've alleged sufficiently in this complaint that I could 2.0 21 take this complaint and go and indict Omegle with it? 22 MR. MARSH: Go and --Indict them for a federal 2.3 JUDGE BRASHER: 24 crime? 25 MR. MARSH: Well --



| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | JUDGE BRASHER: I mean, because that's the |
| 3 | standard, right, of 1591? |
| 4 | MR. MARSH: I'd like to indict them for a |
| 5 | federal crime. |
| 6 | JUDGE BRASHER: Yeah. |
| 7 | MR. MARSH: I mean, you know, the federal |
| 8 | government has powers that we do not have. |
| 9 | JUDGE LAGOA: But the difference is in an |
| 10 | indictment you're actually going to have testimony |
| 11 | before a grand jury and you're going to have |
| 12 | witnesses; correct? |
| 13 | MR. MARSH: And subpoenas and subpoena |
| 14 | power. |
| 15 | JUDGE LAGOA: And there's going to be |
| 16 | subpoenas and you're going to have an investigation. |
| 17 | I mean, this is not you know, when you're in AUSA, |
| 18 | you have reactive cases. This would not be a reactive |
| 19 | case. It would be an investigative case, which means |
| 20 | that you'd have agents going out and interviewing |
| 21 | witnesses, and then you go before a grand jury |
| 22 | MR. MARSH: You'd have |
| 23 | JUDGE LAGOA: when you have your case |
| 24 | ready. |
| 25 | MR. MARSH: discovery, your Honor. |



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| 2 | JUDGE LAGOA: Well |
| 3 | MR. MARSH: In effect. |
| 4 | JUDGE LAGOA: In effect. |
| 5 | MR. MARSH: In a criminal effect. |
| 6 | JUDGE BRASHER: Yeah. But the standard |
| 7 | but the standard for liability Congress has made, I |
| 8 | think, the standard for liability, a violation of a |
| 9 | federal you know, it's the same as the criminal |
| 10 | activity. So |
| 11 | MR. MARSH: It's the criminal activities, |
| 12 | but you'd only need to prove it in this context by a |
| 13 | preponderance of evidence |
| 14 | JUDGE BRASHER: Right. |
| 15 | MR. MARSH: not by the criminal |
| 16 | standard. |
| 17 | JUDGE BRASHER: Sure. |
| 18 | MR. MARSH: And so, you know, not to say |
| 19 | we're mixing metaphors here, but to hold us to a |
| 20 | criminal standard in terms of our papers, I think, you |
| 21 | know, not only makes our, you know, Rule 8 |
| 22 | requirements beyond what the the civil, you know, |
| 23 | rules require, but also sort of undercuts, you know, |
| 24 | the congressional intent and this Court this |
| 25 | circuit's intent to to have a different standard |
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MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC



| 1 | MH v. OMEGLE.COM LLC |
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| 2 | when it comes to the protection of children. |
| 3 | JUDGE LAGOA: Thank you very much. Very |
| 4 | interesting case. |
| 5 | MR. MARSH: Thank you very much, your |
| 6 | Honor. |
| 7 | JUDGE LAGOA: We're going to be in a short |
| 8 | recess, and then we'll be back for the last case of |
| 9 | the calendar. Thank you. |
| 10 | MR. MARSH: Thank you. Thank you, Judge |
| 11 | Carnes. |
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CERTIFICATION

3 | STATE OF NEW YORK:

COUNTY OF MONROE:

I, JAYME C. WINTISH, do hereby certify that I transcribed from the media provided the foregoing pages of the above-styled cause, and that they were prepared under my personal supervision and constitute a true and accurate record of the proceedings as I heard them;

I further certify that I am not an attorney or counsel of any parties, nor a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor financially interested in the action;

WITNESS my hand in the City of Rochester, County of Monroe, State of New York.

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| 01Wi6361272 m 4 224 4 29 - 3523, 38.8 40 19 - 37.11 29 - 41.17.20, 19.21, 400 19 - 12.22 4, 11 - 37.13 20 - 42 (19 - 12.20) 22.18, 32.25, 42.41 44, 33.10, 32.15 30.6, 30.20, 33.12, 36.6 approaching 1-12.23, 22.18, 32.25, 42.41 44, 33.10, 33.99 3 - 31.19, 2.26, 32.87, 22.21, 32.25, 42.21, 32.21, | | T | | T | 43 |
|--|------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------------|
| Actgr 353, 385 actgr 324, 29:18 actgr 322, 29:18 36, 30.20, 33:12 3523, 368 actgr 324, 29:18 36, 30.20, 33:12 3523, 369 311, 172.01 3211, 3219, 3225, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 42:14 36, 32.25, 32.25 36, 32.23, 32.27 36, 32.23, 32.27 36, 32.23, 32.27 36, 32.23, 3 | 0 | 4 | 3:15 | 35:17 | applying [2] - 23:8, |
| 4224 | • | • | Act [2] - 35:3, 38:5 | allege [6] - 29:14, | 29:6 |
| 4224 | | | act [2] - 12:24, 29:18 | 30:6, 30:20, 33:12, | appreciate [1] - 9:24 |
| 40 -37: -1 -37: -32: -32: -33: -3 | 01WI6361272[1] - | 4 [2] - 35:23, 36:8 | | 35:23, 36:9 | approach [1] - 11:25 |
| 1 | 42:24 | 40 [1] - 37:11 | • | alleged [8] - 7:4, | |
| 1,000 - | | 400 [1] - 1:22 | | _ | • |
| | 1 | 41 m - 37:13 | | | 0 0.7 |
| 13:19 13:1 | • | | 1 | | |
| The second color 1 | | 1=[1] 1=1=0 | | | |
| 1-3-91 11-92 14-25-12 14- | 1,000 [1] - 23:15 | 7 | | | |
| | 1-5-9-1 [1] - 9:2 | , | | | |
| 1.52 | 10001 [1] - 2:7 | | - | | |
| 14-year-old 14-24, 40-17 21-15 21-15 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 109 [1] - 1:22 | 71 [1] - 25:22 | | 1 | |
| | 11-year-old [2] - | | · · | • | |
| 25/7 | 4:11, 5:2 | 8 | | | |
| | | | 7 | _ | |
| | | | | 1 | assuming [1] - 15:2 |
| | | 8 [3] - 33:18, 37:15, | actual [11] - 10:9, | amend [1] - 21:11 | attorney [2] - 42:12, |
| 9.12, 9.13, 9.25, 10.6, 10.7, 10.9, 10.14, 10.7, 10.9, 10.14, 10.9, 20.17, 22.3, 22.8, 22.3, 28.8 12.16, 19.9, 20.17, 28.1, 29.13, 32.14, 33.11, 33.13, 33.15, 93.3, 33.15 1595 [s] - 9.10, 10.2, 10.3, 33.11 1595 [s] - 10.5 17 [s] - 11.6, 3.2 18 [s] - 8.20, 8.25, 12.23, 28.22, 27.23, 28.3, 28.8 18591 [s] - 8.24 20 22 [s] - 11.6, 3.2 22 [s] - 25.4 22 [s] - 25.4 22 [s] - 25.4 22 [s] - 25.21 223 [s] - 25.21 223 [s] - 25.21 223 [s] - 25.21 223 [s] - 25.21 233 [s] - 1.7 231 [s] - 25.22 33 [s] - 3.3 [s] - 3.18 3 [s] - 8.20, 32.9 33 [s] - 3.19 34 [s] - 3.19, 42.3, 8.10, 35.9 35 [s] - 3.19 35 [s] - 3.11 35 [s] - 3.12 [s] - 3.12, 3.13 35 [s] - 3.18 35 [s] - 3.18 35 [s] - 3.18 35 [s] - 3.18 36 [s] - 3.19 37 [s] - 3.11 38 [s] - 3.12 [s] - 3.12, 3.13 38 [s] - 3.18 38 [s] - | | 40:21 | 10:13, 16:18, 19:2, | amended [2] - 19:3, | 42:13 |
| 322, 328 | | 84 [4] - 14:9, 31:25, | 19:4, 19:7, 20:17, | 21:10 | AUSA [1] - 39:17 |
| A | | 32:2, 32:8 | 20:20, 23:5, 29:5 | Amendment [4] - | |
| 34:9 34:9 34:9 34:9 34:9 34:9 34:9 34:9 34:0 34:0 34:9 34:0 | | 87 [2] - 32:2, 32:8 | added [1] - 32:21 | 14:4, 14:21, 32:22, | 37:2 |
| 32/19 32/14 33/13 32/14 33/14 33/15 33/15 39/18 33/16 33/18 33/1 | ' ' | | adding [1] - 32:23 | 34:9 | |
| Size | ' ' | q | additional [1] - 33:3 | amount [2] - 30:24, | |
| A | | <u> </u> | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Second S | | 95 [2] - 24:6, 27:16 | | _ | |
| A | | 9th [1] - 29:2 | | | · · |
| A | | | | | |
| Backpage [2] - 35:9, 35:19 | 10:3, 33:11 | Δ | • | • | 14.24 |
| 18 | 1595's [1] - 10:5 | | | | |
| A | 17 [2] - 1:16, 3:2 | | | • | В |
| | 18 [7] - 8:20, 8:25, | A1 [2] - 10:19, 10:20 | | | |
| 28:3, 32:8 18591 [i] - 8:24 Above-styled [i] - 42:7 Above-Titled [i] - 3:19, 42:7 22 [i] - 25:4 22-10338 [i] - 1:7 223 [i] - 25:21 2252 [2] - 19:6, 25:5 230 [14] - 3:19, 4:23, 8:10, 8:13, 17:15, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 330 [i] - 19:11 231 [i] - 25:22 330 [i] - 19:11 231 [i] - 25:22 330 [i] - 3:10, 33:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:6, 36:9 331 [2] - 25:7 331 [2] - 25:7 331 [2] - 25:8 331 [2] - 25:9 331 [2] - 25:18 331 [2] - 25:22 331 [2] - 25:22 331 [2] - 25:22 332 [3] - 35:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 335:19 340vertisers [s] - 30:2, 31:13 36:3 34PPEALS [i] - 1:3 3appeal [s] - 19:5, 46 [s] - 14:18 3appeal [s] - 19:5, 46 [s] - 19:5, 46 [s] - 14:18 3appeal [s] - 19:5, 42:2, 42:2, 5:7, 38:3 3appeal [s] - 19:5, 42:4, 28:12 3appeal [s] - 19:5, 41:18 4 | 12:23, 25:22, 27:23, | A2 [3] - 10:19, 11:17, | 1 | | Backnage [2] - 35:9 |
| above-styled [1] - 42:7 | 28:3, 32:8 | 12:22 | | 1 | |
| 2 | 18591 [1] - 8:24 | above-styled [1] - | | | |
| Above-Titled [1] | | 42:7 | | i i | |
| 1:11 | 2 | Above-Titled [1] - | • | | |
| absolute | | 1 | | APPEALS [1] - 1:3 | |
| 2022 | | absolute [2] - 3:19. | advice [1] - 37:4 | appear [2] - 14:18, | |
| 22 [1] - 25:4 absolutely [2] - 23:19, 24:10 absurd [3] - 26:14, 26:15, 26:20 absurd [1] - 26:11, 26:15, 26:20 absurdity [2] - 26:11, 26:17 absure [9] - 4:6, 4:16, 4:25, 5:8, 36:4, 36:7, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 absued [4] - 23:16, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 absuers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 algorithm [2] - 13:14, 32:27 32:17, 32:19, 32:10 appellant [4] - 19:5, 23:24 basis [1] - 25:18 became [2] - 29:3, 38:14 become [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 30:21, 37:31 32:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 36:18 acknowledge [1] - 36:17 acknowledge [1] - 36:18 acknowledge [1] - 36:17 acknowledge [1] - 36:18 acknowledge [1] - 36:17 acknowledge [1] - 36:18 acknowledg | 2022 [2] - 1:16, 3:2 | • • • • • | age [6] - 6:25, 12:13, | 14:19 | |
| 22-10338 [1] - 1:7 223 [1] - 25:21 2252A [2] - 19:6, 25:5 230 [14] - 3:19, 4:23, 8:10, 8:13, 17:15, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230 [1] - 25:22 23 [1] - 25:22 23 [1] - 26:14, 26:15, 26:20 25:17 26:17 27 29 29:13, 27:22 29 29:13, 27:22 29 29:13, 29:10 2 | 22 [1] - 25:4 | | 12:22, 13:6, 17:22, | Appearing [2] - 2:3, | |
| 223 [1] - 25:21 2252A [2] - 19:6, 25:5 230 [14] - 3:19, 4:23, 8:10, 8:13, 17:15, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230's [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 3 3 12] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 28absurdity [2] - 26:11, 26:15, 26:20 absurdity [2] - 26:11, 26:17 abuse [9] - 4:6, 4:16, 4:25, 5:8, 36:4, 36:7, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 abused [4] - 23:16, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 accest [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 36:18 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 42:9 accest [2] - 14:19, 23:24 appellant [4] - 19:5, 20:18, 22:5, 31:14 Appellant [2] - 1:6, 20:18, 22:5, 31:14 Appellants [1] - 1:6, 20:18, 22:5, 31:14 Appellants [1] - 1:6, 20:18, 22:5, 31:14 Appellants [1] - 1:6, 21:3 appellants [1] - 1:6, 22:3 appellants [1] - 1:6, 23:24 Appellants [1] - 1:6, 23:24 basis [1] - 25:18 became [2] - 29:3, 38:14 become [2] - 29:4, 19:12 become [3] - 3:14 Behalf [2] - 1:6, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 applies [5] - 7:21, 39:19, 29:19, 30:3, 39:19 belabor [1] - 3:14 become [2] - 1:9, 21:0 behavior [6] - 7:10, 7:11, 8:9, 8:22, 14:2 | 22-10338 [1] - 1:7 | - | 32:7 | 2:10 | |
| 2252A [2] - 19:6, 25:5 26:15, 26:20 agree [3] - 20:13, 27:21, 27:22 ahsurdity [2] - 26:11, 26:17 ahuse [9] - 4:6, 4:16, 4:25, 5:8, 36:4, 36:7, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 abused [4] - 23:16, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 accest [2] - 13:12, 34:3 33:10, 37:3 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 37:11 agree [3] - 20:13, 27:21, 27:22 ahead [1] - 8:17 aimed [1] - 12:16 Appellant [2] - 1:6, 2:3 appellants [1] - 4ppellant [2] - 1:6, 2:3 appellant [2] - | | 1 | agents [1] - 39:20 | appellant [4] - 19:5, | |
| 25:5 230 [14] - 3:19, 4:23, 8:10, 8:13, 17:15, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230 [s [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 31 [2] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 33 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 26:17, 27:22 ahead [1] - 8:17 aimed [1] - 12:16 Alabama [1] - 1:14 algorithm [2] - 13:7, 19:12 allegation [6] - 14:14, 27:17, 30:17, 30:18, 30:18 30:18 31 [2] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 33 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 25:10 Appellant [2] - 1:6, 2:3 appellants [1] - 19:12 Appellee [2] - 1:9, 2:10 appellee [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 29:6 applied [2] - 1:5, 29:8 applies [5] - 7:21, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 10:10 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 benefit [3] - 30:3, 30:13, 36:10 | | • | | | |
| 230 [14] - 3:19, 4:23, 8:10, 8:13, 17:15, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230 [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 3 | • • • | | | | became [2] - 29:3, |
| 8:10, 8:13, 17:15, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230's [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 3 3 1[2] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 20.17 abuse [9] - 4:6, 4:16, 4:25, 5:8, 36:4, 36:7, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 abuse [9] - 4:6, 4:16, 4:25, 5:8, 36:4, 36:7, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 abuse [1] - 4:11 algorithm [2] - 13:7, 17:12 21 [1] - 19:11 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - aimed [1] - 12:16 Alabama [1] - 1:14 algorithm [2] - 13:7, 17:12 2:10 appellea [2] - 1:9, 2:10 appellee [2] - 1:9, 2:10 appellee [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 29:6 applicable [1] - 29:6 applicable [1] - 18:21 behavior [6] - 7:10, 7:11, 8:9, 8:22, 14:22, 28:18 belabor [1] - 37:12 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 benefit [3] - 30:3, 30:13, 36:10 applied [2] - 1:9, 2:10 appellee [2] - 1:9, 2:10 applicable [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 18:21 beneficial [1] - 3:14 Behalf [2] - 2:3, 2:10 behavior [6] - 7:10, 7:11, 8:9, 8:22, 14:22, 28:18 belabor [1] - 37:12 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 benefit [3] - 30:3, 30:13, 36:10 benefited [3] - 14:9, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:12, 32:12, 32:12, 32:12, | | • • • • | | | 38:14 |
| 19:7, 19:16, 21:6, 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230's [1] - 19:11 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 albusels [3] - 4.5, 4.5, 5.8, 36:4, 36:7, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 Alabama [1] - 1:14 algorithm [2] - 13:7, 17:12 2:10 appellee [2] - 1:9, 2:10 behavior [6] - 7:10, 7:11, 8:9, 8:22, 14:22, 28:18 belabor [1] - 29:6 applied [2] - 12:5, 29:8 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 37:11 albusels [3] - 4:14 Appellee [2] - 1:9, 2:10 behavior [6] - 7:10, 7:11, 8:9, 8:22, 14:22, 28:18 belabor [1] - 37:12 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 benefit [3] - 30:3, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 27:8, 28:10, 23:44, 23:0, 23:44, 23:45 23 | | | | | become [1] - 36:15 |
| 22:6, 23:7, 27:23, 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230's [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 3 | | | | | bedroom [1] - 4:11 |
| 28:4, 33:10, 35:9 230's [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 3 abused [4] - 23:16, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 33:22 alignary accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 37:11 22:10 appellee [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 29:6 applicable [1] - 29:6 applicable [2] - 12:5, 29:8 belabor [1] - 37:12 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 benefit [3] - 30:3, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, 23:44, 23:4 | | | | | beginning [1] - 3:14 |
| 230's [1] - 19:11 231 [1] - 25:22 abused [4] - 23:16, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 32 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 abused [4] - 23:16, 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18, 31:2, 31:11 allegations [23] - 8:4, 9:18, 9:21, 10:13, 14:7, 14:12, 19:2, 23:24, 27:15, 27:19, 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - appellee [1] - 18:21 applicable [1] - 29:6 applicable [1] - 18:21 ap | | | | ••• | Behalf [2] - 2:3, 2:10 |
| 231 [1] - 25:22 24:8, 24:9, 24:23 | | | | | |
| 3 abusers [1] - 36:17 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 according [1] - 36:18 32 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 abusers [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 according [1] - 37:11 abusers [1] - 23:12, 32:17, 30:17, 30:17, 30:18, 30:19, 31:2, 31:11 applied [2] - 12:5, 29:8 applied [2] - 12:1, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 applies [5] - 7:21, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 applied [2] - 12:18, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 applied [2] - 12:18, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 applied [2] - 12:18, 19:14, 22:7, 24:17, 30:13, 36:10 applied [2] - 12:5, 29:8 applied [2] - 12:18, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 29:4, 2 | | , , | | | |
| 3 accept [2] - 30:16, 30:18 accest [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 37:12 34:19 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 allegations [23] - 36:18 31 [2] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 allegations [23] - 8:4, 9:18, 9:21, 10:13, 14:7, 14:12, 19:2, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 10:10 beneficiary [1] - 10:10 benefit [3] - 30:3, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 19:14, 22:7, 24:17, 30:13, 36:10 benefited [3] - 14:9, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, 32:4, 23 | 23. [1] - 23.22 | abusers [1] - 36:17 | | | |
| 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 32 [1] - 36:18 32 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 30:18 access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 According [1] - 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - acknowledge [1] - access [2] - 13:12, 34:3, 14:7, 14:12, 19:2, 23:24, 27:15, 27:19, 29:12, 29:13, 30:3, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 29:0 acknowledge [1] - acknowledge [1] - acknowledge [1] - acknowledge [1] - access [2] - 13:12, 34:10 applies [5] - 7:21, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 10:10 applies [5] - 7:21, 19:8, 19:20, 19:21, 34:19 10:10 beneficial [1] - 5:23 beneficial [1] - 10:10 beneficial | • | accept [2] - 30:16, | | | |
| access [2] - 13:12, 34:3 31 [2] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 access [2] - 13:12, 14:7, 14:12, 19:2, 14:7, 14:12, 19:2, 23:24, 27:15, 27:19, 29:12, 29:13, 30:3, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 27:8, 28:10, 27:4, 20:9 acknowledge [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - | 3 | 30:18 | | | |
| 31 [2] - 2:6, 36:9 32 [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 34:3 According [1] - 33:22 accurate [1] - 42:9 acknowledge [1] - 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:19, 32:17, 32:17, 32:17, 32:17 | | access [2] - 13:12, | | | |
| 32 [1] - 36:18 34 [1] - 37:7 39 [1] - 37:11 According [1] - 25:24, 27:19, 27:19, 29:11, 30:3, 30:3, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 27:8, 28:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:8, 28:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:8, 28:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:8, 28:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 20:10, 27:4, 20:0, 27:4 | 31 [2] - 2:6 36:0 | 34:3 | | | |
| 33:22 29:12, 29:13, 30:3, apply [9] - 12:18, 19:14, 22:7, 24:17, 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, 32:4, 32:9 | | According [1] - | | | |
| 39[1] - 37:11 accurate [1] - 42:9 30:4, 31:4, 31:25, 19:14, 22:7, 24:17, 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, 30:4, 30:14 30:15 3 | | | | | |
| acknowledge [1] - 32:17, 32:19, 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, 20:14:9, 23:12, 32:17, 32:19 | | | | 19:14, 22:7, 24:17, | |
| ALLIANCE 4:14, 35:9 | 39 [1] - 37.11 | | 32:12, 32:17, 32:19, | 24:19, 27:8, 28:10, | |
| ALLIANCE | | | \^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ | L 4:14, 35:9 | 32:4, 32:9 |
| | | | <u>ALLIANC</u> | <u>C</u> | <u> </u> |

3:20, 3:22, 3:23, 3:24, 40:25 34:20 benefits [1] - 29:16 contributions [1] best [3] - 5:21, 9:23, 4:4, 4:21, 6:24, 7:16, City [1] - 42:15 concerning [1] -3.15 8:15, 10:8, 10:24, civil [9] - 9:10, 9:11, 4.14 16:11 COPPA [1] - 17:20 10:25, 11:20, 11:22, 10:3, 10:6, 26:2, between [1] - 16:13 conclusory [1] copy [1] - 35:22 beyond [4] - 14:21, 12:6, 12:13, 12:18, 28:16, 28:20, 33:21, 35:25 corporation [1] -13:25, 14:19, 16:16, 17:14, 34:9, 40:22 40:22 conduct [8] - 9:11, 7:18 16:22, 18:22, 20:2, **black** [1] - 34:22 claim [10] - 9:10, 9:18, 10:20, 12:17, correct [15] - 6:17, 21:9, 23:24, 27:2, 9:12, 19:6, 19:9, 28:3, 28:5, 28:6, blanket [1] - 14:14 7:7, 7:25, 9:15, 10:15, 27:3, 27:7, 27:20, boom [12] - 3:20, 20:17, 21:20, 25:3, 28:24 11:8, 13:10, 13:18, 33:8, 33:21, 33:25, 25:4, 28:6, 32:20 confidential [1] -4:2, 4:9, 6:6, 17:6, 15:5, 21:20, 22:17, 34:6, 34:12, 34:16, **claims** [9] - 19:2, 24:5 22:22, 23:6, 27:25, 34:20, 37:25, 39:19, 21:7, 22:2, 23:23, confined [1] - 18:25 39:12 **brand** [1] - 36:4 39:23, 41:4, 41:8 24:15, 24:18, 25:17, Congress [4] - 8:21, Correct [2] - 30:23, branded [1] - 36:7 cases [17] - 11:22, 26.2 **BRASHER** [28] - 9:7, 35:6, 38:17, 40:7 35:13 11:23, 14:22, 16:16, clear [4] - 7:16, 15:6, congressional [5] correctly [1] - 28:22 9:17, 10:12, 14:5, 16:19, 16:21, 21:8, 16:19, 19:13 12:3, 12:9, 37:21, Counsel [2] - 3:10, 15:10, 16:2, 18:12, 21:17, 26:25, 33:22, clearly [6] - 12:25, 38:4, 40:24 22:12, 22:18, 22:24, 23:12 34:20, 36:23, 37:14, 17:22, 23:8, 38:13, connected [1] counsel [6] - 3:15, 27:14, 27:21, 28:2, 37:23, 39:18 42:13 3:17, 7:3, 8:24, 42:12, 28:9, 29:9, 29:21, categorically [1] -31:23, 33:7, 35:8, click [1] - 18:6 consider [1] - 18:24 42:13 4.22 client [9] - 4:11, 5:2, consideration [1] -**COUNTY** [1] - 42:4 35:14, 38:11, 38:16, categories [1] -17:22, 20:10, 28:13, 38:23, 39:2, 39:6, 19:4 County [2] - 42:16, 18:23 28:14, 28:15, 28:20, 40:6, 40:14, 40:17 considered [1] - 27:3 42:24 category [2] - 5:20, 30:8 Brasher [1] - 31:17 considering [1] course [1] - 26:5 clients [3] - 23:15, Brasher's [1] - 22:4 19:12 COURT [2] - 1:3, 1:3 causing [2] - 24:22 24:10, 24:20 brief [1] - 33:9 consistent [1] court [4] - 20:22, CDA [1] - 35:3 cloak [1] - 4:25 15:22 29:3, 32:22, 34:10 brought [2] - 9:10, certain [3] - 5:16, 21:19 **co**[1] - 3:15 constitute [1] - 42:9 Court [15] - 1:21, 27:6, 30:24 **bus** [4] - 6:3, 6:4, 6:5 co-counsel [1] - 3:15 constitutes [2] -3:14, 8:8, 11:23, certainly [1] - 5:24 coerced [1] - 4:15 businessman [1] -9:12, 28:7 18:20, 18:23, 18:25, certify [2] - 42:5, 3:25 com [2] - 38:13, 19:2, 26:25, 27:10, constitutionally [1] -42:11 38:14 7:11 29:2, 33:3, 37:25, **but..** [1] - 18:11 CH [4] - 14:10, 20:5, commercial [3] -40:24, 42:23 buy [1] - 11:14 construction [1] -32:6, 32:11 12:23, 14:11, 32:7 Court's [5] - 11:18, 10:17 **challenge** [1] - 17:15 committed [4] - 4:17, 12:11, 19:4, 27:9, C constructive [1] challenges [1] - 10:4 33:13, 33:15, 35:19 33:18 19:8 chapter [1] - 25:22 common [1] - 30:4 construed [3] - 3:19, courts [2] - 33:23, **C1** [2] - 19:16, 25:6 chats [2] - 17:2, 17:3 38:2 **commonly** [2] - 5:7, 9:9, 25:21 calendar [2] - 3:8, child [24] - 4:15, covered [1] - 28:4 consumers [2] -41:9 4:19, 5:6, 5:7, 11:7, Communications [2] 27:5, 34:14 **create** [1] - 37:3 cannot [1] - 4:24 12:7, 12:8, 12:15, - 35:3, 38:5 created [10] - 4:2, contacted [2] cappers [4] - 4:16, 12:17, 12:24, 13:23, company [4] - 6:3, 4:10, 5:3, 7:17, 7:18, 14:22, 15:8 30:7, 36:3, 36:8 21:23, 24:25, 33:25, 17:4, 20:11, 21:22 contemporaneous 16:18, 17:5, 20:3, capping [1] - 36:21 35:5, 36:7, 36:16, comparison [1] -[2] - 31:20, 31:21 25:7, 36:13 capture [3] - 4:16, 36:17, 36:19, 36:20, creating [1] - 38:18 content [18] - 4:8. 16:25, 36:3 37:3, 37:5, 38:5 complaint [25] - 8:5, 4:9, 4:10, 4:22, 4:24, crime [6] - 28:13, care [1] - 17:21 children [29] - 5:5, 9:21, 14:7, 14:13, 33:13, 33:15, 35:20, 13:12, 14:3, 14:4, CARNES [21] - 5:10, 6:25, 7:4, 7:6, 7:13, 15:3, 15:22, 19:3, 14:18, 14:20, 18:8, 38:24, 39:5 6:11, 6:18, 7:3, 7:9, 11:10, 12:10, 13:25, 21:2, 21:10, 21:11, 19:19, 19:23, 20:2, crimes [1] - 11:19 8:4, 8:14, 8:18, 11:6, 17:13, 17:19, 17:21, 29:12, 29:14, 30:13, 20:3, 25:6, 25:8 criminal [31] - 4:24, 11:9, 11:13, 23:11, 20:8, 20:13, 23:15, 31:12, 31:25, 32:2, context [3] - 12:14, 5:14, 5:17, 9:13, 9:15, 23:14, 24:4, 24:18, 23:18, 24:7, 24:9, 32:13, 32:16, 32:23, 34:21, 40:12 9:18, 9:25, 11:22, 25:10, 25:13, 26:3, 24:23, 25:14, 26:21, 33:14, 35:18, 35:22, 11:23, 12:14, 14:17, contextual [1] -26:10, 26:19, 28:12 27:17, 31:4, 34:9, 36:25, 38:20, 38:21 15:3, 25:20, 25:23, 11:24 Carnes [7] - 3:22, 34:14, 34:24, 36:22,

computer [1] - 19:17

component [2] -

components [1] -

7:15, 12:13

12:20

5:9, 6:2, 8:11, 10:23,

carve [5] - 8:20, 9:6,

case [45] - 3:8, 3:16,

9:8, 12:21, 17:16

38:7, 41:11

37:9, 38:8, 41:2

Circuit [1] - 29:3

CIRCUIT [1] - 1:3

circuit's [2] - 33:23,

circuit [1] - 29:3

continue [2] - 23:20,

contributes [1] -

contributing [1] -

24:21

19:25

75:9

25:25, 28:2, 28:15,

28:18, 28:24, 29:6,

29:7, 33:20, 33:21,

40:5, 40:9, 40:11,

40:15, 40:20

34:20, 36:22, 37:14,

| criminally [2] - 20:4, | disregard [1] - 11:18 | 11:2, 11:3 | facts [2] - 21:3, | general [2] - 25:5, |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 24:2 | disregards [1] - | entire [1] - 18:11 | 21:16 | 34:18 |
| CSAM [1] - 5:7 | 11:19 | entity [1] - 14:20 | factual [1] - 14:12 | generalized [1] - |
| cumbersome [1] - | disseminate [1] - | Especially [1] - 16:5 | faith [1] - 17:17 | 24:15 |
| 9:23 | 36:20 | Esq [2] - 2:4, 2:11 | faithfully [1] - 27:8 | generally [1] - 14:8 |
| current [1] - 25:16 | distinction [1] - 8:12 | establish [4] - 9:18, | faster [1] - 11:15 | genesis [1] - 37:22 |
| | distinguish [1] - | 9:20, 10:13, 29:14 | FDCPA[1] - 27:4 | geolocation [4] - |
| D | 5:20 | established [2] - | feature [1] - 13:21 | 4:14, 13:19, 24:13, |
| | distinguishing [1] - | 9:20, 33:23 | federal [8] - 12:6, | 24:25 |
| | 16:15 | establishes [1] - | 12:14, 25:23, 35:19, | girl [1] - 4:11 |
| Daniel [1] - 12:12 | distribute [1] - 37:5 | 10:20 | 38:23, 39:5, 39:7, | girls [3] - 4:3, 4:4, |
| Daniels [4] - 11:21, | DISTRICT [1] - 1:3 | evidence [1] - 40:13 | 40:9 | 4:6 |
| 12:2, 12:5, 34:16 | district [6] - 20:21, | exact [1] - 14:17 | financial [1] - 30:13 | given [1] - 12:2 |
| data [1] - 13:21 | 32:22, 34:10, 34:11, | exactly [2] - 10:16, | financially [4] - | Google [1] - 36:5 |
| Date [1] - 1:16 | 34:22, 38:2 | | | • • • |
| debt [3] - 27:6, 34:7, | · | 30:10 | 29:16, 32:9, 36:10, | Gorsuch [1] - 27:7 |
| 34:15 | divine [1] - 17:11 | example [3] - 5:21, | 42:14 | government [1] - |
| Decency [2] - 35:3, | Docket [1] - 1:7 | 14:9, 20:6 | fine [1] - 16:7 | 39:8 |
| 38:5 | doctrine [1] - 26:11 | exception [12] - | Firm [1] - 2:5 | grand [2] - 39:11, |
| decent [1] - 35:4 | Doe [2] - 20:3, 31:21 | 7:15, 8:13, 19:24, | First [4] - 14:4, | 39:21 |
| decide [1] - 6:22 | done [1] - 35:18 | 20:7, 20:14, 22:7, | 14:21, 32:22, 34:9 | Great [1] - 18:17 |
| decided [1] - 37:24 | dot [2] - 38:13, 38:14 | 26:11, 26:18, 27:23, | first [4] - 9:19, 18:25, | grill [1] - 17:7 |
| | down [1] - 16:6 | 28:8, 28:19, 38:18 | 19:15, 29:3 | group [1] - 27:5 |
| decision [6] - 12:11, | dubious [1] - 8:12 | exceptions [2] - 8:7, | flesh [1] - 33:2 | guess [4] - 13:4, |
| 15:13, 15:15, 22:4, | due [2] - 6:24, 10:23 | 20:23 | Floor [1] - 2:6 | 13:7, 21:18, 35:16 |
| 27:9, 34:10 | during [1] - 37:24 | excuse [1] - 25:5 | focus [1] - 36:19 | Gunning [2] - 2:11, |
| decisions [2] - | | exempt [2] - 19:6, | folks [1] - 27:5 | 18:21 |
| 14:20, 26:24 | E | 21:8 | follow [2] - 14:6, | GUNNING [35] - |
| defendant [5] - 3:20, | | exemption [9] - | 26:3 | 18:18, 18:20, 20:16, |
| 14:10, 28:13, 31:18, | | 19:15, 19:16, 25:6, | follow-up [1] - 14:6 | 21:5, 21:14, 21:21, |
| 34:7 | E1 [2] - 25:19, 25:24 | 25:25, 26:2, 26:6, | forced [2] - 14:11, | 21:25, 22:17, 22:22, |
| Defendant [5] - 14:9, | E5A [1] - 28:23 | 28:10, 28:22, 28:23 | 32:6 | 23:6, 23:13, 23:23, |
| 32:4, 32:6, 32:9, 38:9 | effect [5] - 25:20, | exemptions [3] - | foregoing [1] - 42:7 | 24:14, 25:2, 25:12, |
| defendant's [2] - | 36:3, 40:3, 40:4, 40:5 | 19:12, 19:14, 28:11 | form [1] - 24:8 | 25:16, 25:24, 26:8, |
| 28:6, 28:23 | effectively [1] - | existential [1] - | forth [1] - 23:19 | 26:17, 26:23, 27:19, |
| defendants [2] - | 35:19 | 26:21 | forward [1] - 21:19 | 27:25, 28:5, 28:10, |
| 15:6, 36:10 | effectuates [1] - | expect [1] - 15:18 | 1 | 28:21, 29:20, 29:23, |
| defense [1] - 28:17 | 27:11 | experienced [1] - | FOSTA [9] - 7:15, | 30:2, 30:10, 30:18, |
| degradation [1] - | element [1] - 34:19 | 37:25 | 8:20, 9:5, 9:6, 22:6, | 31:2, 31:5, 31:11, |
| 3:21 | elements [2] - 32:19, | explain [2] - 29:21, | 23:10, 25:4, 35:7 | 32:15, 33:6 |
| den [1] - 3:21 | 34:4 | 32:19 | FOSTA's [1] - 28:23 | 32.13, 33.0 |
| designed [4] - 6:8, | ELEVENTH [1] - 1:3 | | franchisers [1] - | Н |
| 6:12, 6:14, 7:13 | employee [1] - 42:13 | explained [1] - 31:17 | 16:20 | П |
| determine [1] - 18:2 | enabled [1] - 5:4 | exploit [2] - 7:13, | fraud [1] - 37:17 | |
| dial [1] - 37:24 | | 36:21 | free [2] - 30:12, | hand [1] - 42:15 |
| difference [1] - 39:9 | enacted [1] - 27:4 | exploitation [6] - | 36:12 | happy [2] - 18:13, |
| different [4] - 5:24, | encouraged [2] - | 12:11, 20:8, 20:12, | Freelance [1] - 42:23 | 33:3 |
| | 5:4, 35:15 | 26:21, 32:10, 34:8 | Freesites [1] - 34:12 | haven [1] - 36:16 |
| 26:25, 37:8, 40:25 | enforced [1] - 6:20 | expressed [1] - 12:9 | frequently [1] - | head [1] - 16:10 |
| differentiates [1] - | enforcement [1] - | extent [1] - 7:10 | 13:23 | hear [3] - 4:7, 6:9, |
| 10:24 | 25:21 | extort [1] - 14:2 | friends [1] - 4:12 | 8:10 |
| direction [1] - 38:3 | engage [4] - 4:24, | extorted [1] - 4:13 | front [1] - 32:16 | |
| discovery [9] - 7:16, | 12:23, 14:11, 32:7 | | frustrates [1] - 27:10 | heard [1] - 42:10 |
| 16:23, 17:10, 17:25, | engaged [2] - 28:13, | F | full [3] - 18:16, | hearts [1] - 24:20 |
| 20:9, 20:25, 21:13, | 29:18 | - | 20:22, 24:21 | heightened [3] - |
| 21:15, 39:25 | enter [1] - 13:10 | | functions [1] - 18:9 | 34:12, 37:16, 37:18 |
| discusses [1] - | enterprise [2] - 7:6, | face [1] - 28:15 | | help [1] - 5:13 |
| 11:17 | 7:12 | facilitated [1] - 4:6 | furthers [1] - 27:12 | Henson [2] - 27:2 |
| discussion [1] - | enterprises [2] - | fact [6] - 5:13, 15:16, | | hereby [1] - 42:5 |
| 36:19 | 5:15, 5:17 | 15:17, 17:5, 22:18, | G | higher [2] - 33:22, |
| | · · | 33:25 | | 34:12 |
| dismissed [1] - | enticed [1] - 5:4 | 33.23 | | 07.12 |
| dismissed [1] - 32:22 | enticed [1] - 5:4 enticing [3] - 10:21, | factor (1) - 16:15 | gaining [1] - 34:3 | Hillary [1] - 3:16 |

hold [1] - 40:19 Honor [40] - 3:6, 3:11, 3:13, 6:23, 7:7, 7:14, 7:25, 8:25, 9:16, 10:15, 11:17, 11:20, 12:9, 13:3, 13:11, 14:15, 15:6, 15:25, 16:11, 16:17, 18:17, 20:17, 21:5, 21:14, 21:21, 21:25, 22:22, 24:14, 25:2, 26:2, 26:8, 26:23, 30:10, 31:6, 31:12, 32:16, 33:17, 37:12, 39:25, 41.6 Honor's [1] - 28:22 **hope** [1] - 5:12 hotel [3] - 15:19, 17:23, 23:2 hotels [5] - 15:15, 15:16, 16:20, 16:21, hours [1] - 10:18 household [3] -27:5, 34:7, 34:14 how-tos [1] - 36:21 **Hudson** [1] - 2:6 **human** [1] - 36:17 hypothetical [1] -21:16

ı

ICS [1] - 19:25 idea [1] - 23:17 identify [1] - 13:24 identity [1] - 23:17 illegal [2] - 14:3, 14:20 image [1] - 18:6 immune [4] - 23:19, 24:10, 25:11, 25:17 immunity [17] - 3:18, 3:19, 4:23, 7:21, 7:24, 8:3, 8:6, 8:8, 19:21, 20:15, 20:23, 23:21, 23:25, 24:17, 24:19, 24:21, 38:10 impair [2] - 9:9, 25:21 implicated [3] - 25:3, 25:4, 37:14 implication [1] - 13:5 important [3] - 16:8, 17:16. 31:16 importantly [1] -30:5 impunity [1] - 37:5 **IN** [1] - 1:3

inaudible [8] - 5:11, 5:14, 23:16, 23:22, 25:13, 25:14, 26:6, 26:22 Inaudible [1] - 24:4 inaudible) [4] -11:15, 24:13, 26:7, 26:16 Inc [1] - 1:21 incidents [1] - 23:25 include [1] - 37:2 included [1] - 36:24 including [1] - 36:11 increased [2] -36:11. 36:13 indeed [1] - 29:4 indicates [1] - 21:8 indict [3] - 38:21,

indictment [1] -39:10 individuals [4] -13:20, 30:7, 36:2,

38:23, 39:4

37:10 industry [1] - 17:24 information [7] -4:13, 14:2, 14:23, 17:18, 19:19, 34:3 Inn [1] - 16:15 Inns [2] - 15:13, 15:23

instance [1] - 29:8 instructive [2] -33:20, 34:16 instruments [1] -

intended [1] - 26:15 intent [7] - 12:3, 17:11. 27:11. 35:6. 38:5, 40:24, 40:25 intention [1] - 8:21 interactive [1] -19.17

interested [1] - 42:14 interesting [1] - 41:4 internal [1] - 24:5 interpret [2] - 10:5,

interpretation [5] -11:25, 26:6, 26:7, 26:12, 35:2

interpreted [2] -10:4. 33:10 interviewing [1] -39:20

investigation [1] -39.16 investigations [1] -

14:17 investigative [1] - 39:19

invite [1] - 4:2 invited [1] - 4:11 involve [1] - 15:4 involved [6] - 3:23, 4:24, 13:16, 13:19, 14:16, 20:10

involvement [1] -37:8

involves [1] - 22:16 involving [1] - 15:21 **Igbal** [2] - 21:9,

issue [9] - 7:20, 16:8, 21:25, 24:15, 33:18, 34:2, 34:17, 37:15 issues [3] - 19:5,

19:9, 33:25 itself [4] - 4:18, 13:7, 14:16, 17:19

J

James [1] - 2:4 jamesmarsh@ marsh.law [1] - 2:8 **JAYME** [1] - 42:5 Jayme [2] - 1:20, 42:23 JH [1] - 3:8 John [2] - 20:3, 31:21 judge [2] - 20:22, 32.22 JUDGE [86] - 3:4, 3:7, 3:12, 5:10, 6:11, 6:18, 7:3, 7:9, 7:20, 7:23, 8:2, 8:4, 8:14, 8:18, 8:24, 9:3, 9:7, 9:17, 10:12, 11:6, 11:9, 11:13, 13:2, 13:4, 13:13, 13:16, 14:5, 15:2, 15:7, 15:10, 16:2, 16:7, 18:12, 18:15, 18:19, 20:6, 20:21, 21:12, 21:18, 21:22, 22:12, 22:18, 22:24, 23:11, 23:14, 24:4, 24:18, 25:10, 25:13, 25:18, 26:3, 26:10, 26:19, 27:14, 27:21, 28:2, 28:9, 28:12, 29:9,

39:15, 39:23, 40:2, 40:4, 40:6, 40:14, 40:17, 41:3, 41:7 Judge [13] - 3:22, 5:9, 6:2, 8:11, 8:17, 10:23, 22:4, 31:16, 34:2, 36:23, 37:13, 38:7. 41:10 judgments [1] - 6:19 JUDICIAL [1] - 1:3

jury [2] - 39:11, 39:21

Justice [1] - 27:7

K

key [2] - 13:10, 37:9

kimberlee [1] - 18:21

Kimberlee [1] - 2:11 kind [6] - 14:3, 14:17, 22:20, 26:20, 29:10 kinds [2] - 13:11, 26:25 knowing [13] - 7:15, 10:9, 10:20, 22:9, 22:15, 24:21, 30:3, 33:24, 34:4, 34:17, 34:18, 35:10 Knowingly [1] -29:16 **knowingly** [5] - 14:9, 15:20, 32:4, 32:9, 35:24 knowledge [31] -7:18, 10:14, 15:3, 16:18, 17:11, 17:17, 19:7, 19:8, 20:17, 20:20, 20:24, 21:20, 21:23, 22:3, 22:13, 22:21, 23:5, 23:9, 23:25, 24:16, 29:5, 30:15, 31:14, 31:18, 31:20, 31:21, 33:18, 36:18, 36:24 known [8] - 4:18, 9:4, 10:6, 15:14, 18:6, 22:10, 22:25 knows [3] - 4:16, 16:24, 20:11

L

LAGOA[37] - 3:4, 3:7, 3:12, 7:20, 7:23, 8:2, 8:24, 9:3, 13:2, 13:4, 13:13, 13:16, 15:2, 15:7, 16:7, **√**8:15, 18:19, 20:6,

20:21, 21:12, 21:18, 21:22, 25:18, 29:24, 30:6, 30:16, 30:23, 31:3, 31:7, 33:5, 39:9, 39:15, 39:23, 40:2, 40:4, 41:3, 41:7 Lagoa [3] - 34:2, 36:23. 37:13

language [5] - 9:8, 18:22, 19:11, 19:13, 26:18

last [2] - 26:9, 41:8

Law [1] - 2:5 law [11] - 5:8, 6:20, 7:13, 25:16, 25:20, 27:8, 27:13, 34:2, 34:22, 35:6, 37:22

laws [2] - 5:6, 12:6 lawsuit [1] - 21:19 leak [1] - 13:21 learned [1] - 36:25 legislative [1] -

27:11 **legitimate** [1] - 5:24 lesser [1] - 10:8 letter [1] - 34:22 level [3] - 16:22, 20:25, 31:13

liability [8] - 9:13, 10:11, 16:21, 27:23, 28:16, 28:20, 40:7,

40:8 liable [2] - 5:18, 19:22

limited [3] - 3:18, 19:2, 19:4 **limits** [3] - 18:22, 18:23, 19:11 link [4] - 6:8, 6:12,

limit [2] - 9:9, 19:10

6:15, 17:13 linked [2] - 6:13,

linking [1] - 13:17 links [1] - 6:18 literally [1] - 32:13 LLC [2] - 1:8, 18:21 located [1] - 23:18 Location [1] - 1:14

look [3] - 8:16, 15:15, 18:9 looking [2] - 10:4,

32:24

M

Mabie [1] - 3:16 maintained [1] - 17:3 malevolent [1] -

29:21, 29:24, 30:6,

30:16, 30:23, 31:3,

31:7, 31:23, 33:5,

33:7, 35:8, 35:14,

39:2, 39:6, 39:9,

38:11, 38:16, 38:23,

| 24:20 |
|--------------------------|
| |
| manufacturer [1] - |
| 5:21 |
| manufacturers [2] - |
| 5:13, 5:15 |
| map [1] - 32:24 |
| Margaret [1] - 3:16 |
| mARSH[1] - 18:17 |
| Marsh [2] - 2:4, 2:5 |
| MARSH [50] - 3:6, |
| 3:11, 3:13, 5:25, 6:17, |
| |
| 6:23, 7:7, 7:14, 7:22, |
| 7:25, 8:6, 8:16, 8:19, |
| 8:25, 9:4, 9:15, 9:22, |
| 10:15, 11:8, 11:11, |
| 11:16, 13:3, 13:10, |
| 13:15, 13:18, 14:15, |
| 15:5, 15:9, 15:24, |
| 16:5, 16:11, 18:13, |
| 33:16, 35:13, 35:21, |
| 38:14, 38:22, 38:25, |
| 39:4, 39:7, 39:13, |
| 39:22, 39:25, 40:3, |
| |
| 40:5, 40:11, 40:15, |
| 40:18, 41:5, 41:10 |
| masturbating [1] - |
| 18:7 |
| match [1] - 37:10 |
| matches [1] - 13:8 |
| material [1] - 36:21 |
| materially [2] - |
| 19:25, 25:8 |
| materials [2] - 5:8, |
| 37:5 |
| matter [1] - 24:10 |
| Matter [1] - 1:11 |
| mean [18] - 15:11, |
| |
| 20:25, 22:19, 23:6, |
| 26:13, 26:14, 27:14, |
| 27:15, 27:22, 28:17, |
| 28:22, 31:24, 31:25, |
| 35:8, 39:2, 39:7, |
| 39:17 |
| means [3] - 19:20, |
| 28:12, 39:19 |
| media [1] - 42:6 |
| meet [8] - 4:3, 4:12, |
| 5:5, 6:4, 6:5, 11:3, |
| 23:4, 32:13 |
| · · |
| men [2] - 4:3, 6:5 |
| mens [1] - 34:18 |
| mentioned [1] - 22:5 |
| mere [1] - 22:18 |
| met [1] - 32:20 |
| metaphors [1] - |
| 40:19 |
| MH [2] - 1:5, 3:8 |
| might [2] - 15:17, |
| 15:18 |
| minors [1] - 34:21 |
| |
| |

24.3 misappropriated [1] - 20:4 misappropriating [1] - 25:7 misinterpreted [1] -37:22 missed [1] - 26:9 misuse [1] - 5:18 misused [3] - 5:14, 5:17, 5:22 mixing [1] - 40:19 molesters [1] - 13:24 money [2] - 20:12, 30:9 monitor [1] - 17:2 MONROE [1] - 42:4 Monroe [2] - 42:16, 42:24 Montgomery [1] -1:14 **moral** [1] - 6:19 morning [4] - 3:7, 3:13, 18:18, 18:19 Mosey [2] - 3:23, 11.20 mosey [2] - 3:24, 4:4 most [4] - 12:3, 24:20, 30:4, 31:15 movie [1] - 6:7 MR [51] - 3:6, 3:11, 3:13, 5:25, 6:17, 6:23, 7:7, 7:14, 7:22, 7:25, 8:6, 8:16, 8:19, 8:25, 9:4, 9:15, 9:22, 10:15, 11:8, 11:11, 11:16, 13:3, 13:10, 13:15, 13:18, 14:15, 15:5, 15:9, 15:24, 16:5, 16:11, 18:13, 18:17, 33:16, 35:13, 35:21, 38:14, 38:22, 38:25, 39:4, 39:7, 39:13, 39:22, 39:25, 40:3, 40:5, 40:11, 40:15, 40:18, 41:5, 41:10 **MS** [35] - 18:18, 18:20, 20:16, 21:5, 21:14. 21:21. 21:25. 22:17, 22:22, 23:6, 23:13, 23:23, 24:14, 25:2, 25:12, 25:16, 25:24, 26:8, 26:17, 26:23, 27:19, 27:25, 28:5, 28:10, 28:21, 29:20, 29:23, 30:2, 30:10, 30:18, 31:2, 31:5, 31:11, 32:15, 33:6

misappropriate [1] -

multiple [1] - 21:11 must [2] - 18:23, 27:13

Ν names [2] - 24:12, Napi [1] - 3:16 18:21, 36:15 narrow [1] - 4:21 Nations [1] - 18:4 - 3:9 necessarily [1] once [2] - 35:17, 13:13 38:2 need [7] - 8:16, 10:8, 10:10, 12:10, 17:25, 24:8, 26:25, 36:14 40:12 neutral [3] - 6:10, 11:3, 11:7, 11:10 18:8 never [1] - 7:4 21:11 New [5] - 1:23, 2:7. **or..** [1] - 15:8 42:16, 42:24 order [4] - 20:24, new [1] - 4:12 21:3, 30:9, 30:24 **NEW** [1] - 42:3 non [1] - 24:16 non-particularized 35:9 [1] - 24:16 originating [1] none [1] - 19:13 19:23 Notary [1] - 42:24 outs [1] - 17:16 nothing [3] - 21:6, 25:20, 35:4 8:10, 22:6, 23:7 **Nothing** [1] - 9:8 own [1] - 28:24 notice [1] - 21:2 November [1] - 1:16 Ρ **NOVEMBER** [1] - 3:2

0

nuances [2] - 9:25,

number [1] - 24:8

10:18

objective [1] - 27:13 obtained [1] - 12:22 obtaining [2] -10:21, 11:4 occur [1] - 24:2 occurred [1] - 5:3 occurring [4] - 8:9, 8:22, 14:24, 18:10 **OF** [4] - 1:3, 1:3, 42:3, 42:4 offenders [1] - 17:14 old [1] - 32:8 Omegle [32] - 3:20, 4:12, 4:14, 4:18, 5:3, 9:19, 13:14, 13:16, 13:22, 14:8, 14:16, 14:21, 19:22, 20:20, 22:2, 25:8, 29:16,

33:15, 35:18, 35:24, 36:4, 36:5, 36:6, 36:7, 36:18, 37:4, 37:7, 37:14, 38:21 Omegle's [1] - 30:11 OMEGLE.COM [1] -Omegle.com [2] -Omeglecom.LLC [1] one [5] - 10:4, 19:6, online [5] - 3:21, 5:5, opportunities [1] ordinarily [1] - 26:13 originally [2] - 35:6, outside [4] - 4:22,

31:15, 31:19, 33:13,

pages [1] - 42:7 **pairs** [1] - 13:9 paper [1] - 38:13 papers [1] - 40:20 paragraph [11] -14:8, 32:8, 35:23, 36:8, 36:9, 36:18, 37:7, 37:11, 37:13 paragraphs [1] -32:2 parse [1] - 12:19 part [4] - 9:19, 17:4, 20:13. 26:9 participate [1] -15:20 participated [2] -20:11, 35:16 participating [1] -24:22 participation [7] -14:10, 17:12, 22:15, 29:17, 32:5, 35:10,

page [2] - 29:11,

38:13

36:14 particular [4] - 12:8, 22:3, 26:25, 27:5 particularized [2] -23:9. 24:16 parties [1] - 42:12 party [7] - 4:8, 4:10, 4:22, 4:23, 6:4, 19:23 passed [3] - 8:21, 12:4, 35:3 passing [1] - 35:6 pay [4] - 30:7, 30:21, 30:23. 31:8 payment [3] - 30:11, 30:14, 30:20 pedophiles [2] -13:23, 30:7 penis [1] - 18:7 people [12] - 6:8, 6:12, 6:15, 6:19, 6:20, 7:5, 13:9, 13:11, 15:18, 23:2, 36:3 percent [2] - 24:7, 27:16 percentage [1] - 5:16 perfect [1] - 23:20 perhaps [1] - 6:3 permit [1] - 26:20 person [1] - 4:5 personal [1] - 42:8 persons [1] - 12:22

perverse[1] - 37:6 physical [1] - 16:14 pimp [1] - 3:25 plain [3] - 19:11, 26:14, 26:18 plaintiff [5] - 20:19, 20:20, 22:11, 31:19, 31:20 **Plaintiff's** [1] - 19:3 plaintiffs [2] - 21:10, 22:3 planning [1] - 11:14 platform [2] - 19:25, 24:3 platforms [1] - 22:7 plausibility [1] -29:15 pleading [5] - 21:3, 32:23, 34:5, 37:17, 37:18 PLLC [1] - 2:5 point [3] - 26:24, 33:12, 35:17 pornographers [2] -36:17, 36:20 pornography [8] -4:15, 4:20, 5:6, 12:15, 12:24, 21:23, 31:4, 33:25

COURT REPORTING, INC.

32:15 12:24, 14:11, 15:16, position [2] - 23:14, prosecution [1] really [1] - 38:4 15:19, 15:21, 17:13, 25.15 25:25 reason [1] - 25:19 restitution [1] - 38:2 22:16, 29:18, 32:10, result [1] - 20:12 posits [1] - 38:9 protect [2] - 12:3, reasonably [1] possible [1] - 21:17 27:4 35:11, 35:14, 35:15, 15:18 retrieve [1] - 17:4 possibly [1] - 26:15 protection [10] rebutted [1] - 34:23 revealing [2] - 13:19, 36:7, 36:14, 36:16, 36:21, 37:3, 37:5 posted [1] - 28:19 11:24, 12:10, 14:21, receipt [1] - 33:24 17:18 **sex-traffic** [1] - 15:19 power [1] - 39:14 34:9, 34:13, 34:20, receive [1] - 30:8 revenue [1] - 31:10 sextort [1] - 17:19 34:24, 35:5, 38:6, powers [1] - 39:8 received [4] - 20:12, robbery [1] - 11:14 sexual [8] - 4:6, 4:16, 41:2 32:5, 35:24, 36:10 Rochester [2] - 1:23, practices [1] - 27:7 12:10, 18:8, 20:8, **prove** [3] - 20:10, pre [1] - 7:16 receives [1] - 30:8 42:15 20:12, 32:7, 34:8 34:4, 40:12 pre-discovery [1] receiving [1] - 29:17 Rodriguez [1] sexually [2] - 23:15, provide [2] - 12:6, 27:10 7.16 recent [1] - 26:24 14:2 24:23 role [1] - 16:20 precedence[1] recently [4] - 18:3, provided [4] - 3:18, Roof [7] - 15:13, **shall** [3] - 9:9, 19:18, 28:25, 34:11 11:18 4:14, 19:19, 42:6 25:20 15:23, 16:14, 16:19, precedent [1] - 33:23 recess [1] - 41:8 provider [3] - 19:17, share [2] - 24:6, 37:4 22:4, 23:7, 31:16 precedents [2] reckless [2] - 11:17, 19:20, 19:22 shared [1] - 24:6 33:19, 38:4 11:18 room [6] - 3:21, 4:2, Pruitt [2] - 11:22, short [1] - 41:7 4:9, 6:6, 17:6, 17:24 precisely [1] - 16:23 recognition [1] -33:19 shotgun [1] - 32:23 12:9 Ruggiero [1] - 12:12 predators [2] **public** [1] - 36:13 should-have [1] -36:16, 36:19 recognize [2] - 10:2, Rule [3] - 33:18, 23:4 Public [1] - 42:24 37:15, 40:21 predicate [2] - 9:16, publisher [1] - 19:18 rule [2] - 26:18, 29:4 **show** [5] - 10:7, 10:2 recognizes [1] - 38:7 predictable [1] - 5:3 purchasers [1] - 4:5 record [3] - 13:5, rules [1] - 40:23 20:19, 20:24, 31:14 purpose [2] - 37:21 **showed** [1] - 24:6 37:12, 42:9 running [1] - 36:12 preference [1] purposes [4] - 5:23, shown [2] - 23:9, 34.24 records [1] - 14:19 5:24, 29:15 28:17 S prepared [1] - 42:8 recruiting [2] pursuits [1] - 37:6 side [2] - 13:20, 10:21, 11:2 preponderance [1] put [3] - 6:9, 6:21, 13:25 40:13 **Red** [7] - 15:13, safe [1] - 36:16 7.5 similar [2] - 14:22, presence [1] - 36:2 15:22, 16:14, 16:19, Santander [1] - 27:2 puts [1] - 6:20 27:9 presumption [2] -22:4, 23:7, 31:16 scheme [1] - 12:14 similarities [1] - 13:9 referenced [1] -34:18, 34:23 scope [1] - 4:23 Q simplistically [1] pretty [1] - 16:19 36:23 screen [3] - 13:20, 27:11 referred [1] - 5:7 preventable [1] - 5:2 16:25, 36:3 **simply** [1] **-** 24:3 reflects [1] - 5:8 primary [1] - 27:12 questioning [1] **search** [1] - 36:6 refuge [1] - 36:16 **sit** [1] - 16:6 principle [2] - 12:5, 22:5 second [3] - 19:3, site [23] - 4:19, 7:2, regard [1] - 11:19 26:11 questions [6] - 8:15, 21:10 7:17, 7:19, 16:17, regulatory [1] **problem** [1] - 5:12 16:2, 16:3, 18:14, seconds [1] - 12:20 16:24, 17:5, 18:4, 12:14 problematic [2] -29:4, 33:3 secret [1] - 24:5 18:9, 20:4, 23:17, 15:12 related [1] - 30:14 **quite** [1] - 9:24 section [27] - 3:18, 25:8, 27:16, 30:12, relation [1] - 33:17 proceed [1] - 3:10 quote [2] - 29:16, 4:23, 8:10, 8:13, 8:19, 30:14, 30:20, 30:21, proceedings [1] relative [1] - 42:12 32:4 9:9, 9:10, 9:12, 9:14, 30:25, 31:3, 31:6, 42.10 remedial [1] - 27:3 17:15, 19:6, 19:8, 36:12, 36:22, 37:8 Proceedings [1] remedy [1] - 10:3 R 19:11, 19:16, 21:6, sites [1] - 35:23 remember [1] - 9:5 22:6, 23:7, 25:4, **situation** [1] - 6:3 **produce** [3] - 4:15, repeatedly [1] - 12:5 25:19, 25:20, 25:21, situations [2] -4:19. 37:3 raised [3] - 19:5, report [1] - 36:24 25:24, 27:23, 28:4, 19:24, 21:15 **producing** [1] - 6:3 19:9, 19:13 reported [1] - 14:19 28:7, 33:10 **So..** [1] - 16:6 randomly [1] - 13:8 **product** [2] - 5:19, **Reporter** [1] - 42:23 see [3] - 14:6, 24:19, so.. [2] - 18:14, 38:15 17:13 rape [1] - 12:6 Reporting [1] - 1:21 33.2 soliciting [2] - 10:22, production [4] rate [1] - 23:20 require [2] - 37:18, seeing [1] - 3:24 11:4 4:20, 4:21, 12:15, rather [1] - 27:10 40:23 **service** [5] - 19:17, solid [1] - 11:19 12:24 rea [1] - 34:18 required [1] - 22:13 19:22, 30:8, 30:9, someone [7] - 18:7, prohibited [4] - 7:11, requirements [2] reactive [2] - 39:18 30:11 20:10, 21:19, 22:14, 12:7, 14:4, 27:6 read [3] - 26:13, 21:9, 40:22 services [1] - 5:19 22:19, 22:25, 28:18 prohibiting [1] - 5:6 26:16, 35:9 reserved [1] - 18:14 set [1] - 17:21 sometimes [2] pronounce [2] reading [1] - 15:22 respect [5] - 6:24, sets [1] - 18:22 13:8, 13:17 13:14, 13:15 10:23, 20:16, 22:2, ready [2] - 3:10, settle [2] - 3:4, 3:5 sorry [5] - 8:25, proof [1] - 10:25 39:24 30:15 **sex** [23] - 4:3, 5:7, 21:21, 26:8, 28:14, prosecuted [1] - 4:4 reality [1] - 3:25 respectfully [1] -**1**1:19, 12:7, 12:8, 29:24

sort [4] - 10:7, 14:8, subjected [1] - 37:16 THURSDAY [1] - 3:2 25:16, 25:17, 27:23, violation [8] - 9:12, 14:13, 40:23 28:13, 28:14, 29:15, 17:19, 22:9, 22:10, submitted [1] - 28:25 TikTok[3] - 36:5, South [1] - 1:22 subpoena [1] - 39:13 36:6 32:7, 33:13, 33:15, 28:7, 29:7, 40:8 speaker [1] - 19:18 42.8 virtual [2] - 3:20, subpoenaed [2] tips [1] - 37:3 special [2] - 12:10, 14:18, 15:8 title [2] - 25:22 undercuts [1] -16:14 34.21 subpoenas [2] -Titled [1] - 1:11 40:23 vulnerable [1] - 12:3 underlie [1] - 21:7 specific [2] - 12:21, 39:13, 39:16 today [4] - 3:14, 4:7, underlying [4] -W 32:23 subsequently [1] -35:2, 37:23 9:11, 28:6, 28:15, specifically [1] -36:25 together [11] - 6:8, 32:18 12:16 suffered [1] - 5:2 6:9, 6:12, 6:13, 6:20, web [2] - 36:11, stage [3] - 7:24, 6:21, 7:5, 10:5, 13:17, undertaking [1] suffice [1] - 12:21 36:13 17:10, 34:5 33:11, 37:10 30:4 **sufficient** [1] - 10:13 website [15] - 4:13, standard [21] - 10:6, unfortunately [2] sufficiently [2] tool [1] - 6:10 4:15, 4:25, 8:9, 8:10, 10:8, 17:21, 19:8, tools [1] - 6:10 10:17, 38:3 29:14, 38:20 8:23, 10:20, 13:6, **Union** [1] - 1:22 20:18, 23:4, 23:8, top [1] - 24:5 **suggest** [1] - 5:17 14:25, 15:4, 21:24, United [5] - 3:22, 24:16, 29:5, 29:6, suggestion [1] - 21:2 topic [1] - 36:19 24:7, 28:18, 28:19, 33:22, 34:13, 37:16, 12:2, 12:12, 18:3, **suggests** [1] - 35:18 tos [1] - 36:21 31.9 37:19, 39:3, 40:6, 33:19 Suite [1] - 1:22 trade [1] - 36:20 well-established [1] 40:7, 40:8, 40:16, **UNITED** [1] - 1:3 supervision [1] traffic [4] - 15:19, -33:2340:20, 40:25 unlawful [2] - 25:6, 42:8 27:17, 36:11, 36:14 wholesale [1] - 26:21 standards [2] - 22:8, 27:6 trafficked [2] - 23:16, supplemental [2] widely [1] - 18:6 32.14 unless [1] - 28:16 29:2, 37:2 24:24 willingly [1] - 20:11 **up** [5] - 14:6, 14:13, stands [1] - 9:5 support [1] - 30:4 traffickers [4] -WINTISH [1] - 42:5 start [1] - 38:2 26:3, 28:16, 37:24 supposed [1] - 30:16 15:17, 35:14, 35:15, Wintish [2] - 1:20, starting [1] - 10:7 **US**[2] - 26:24, 28:3 Supreme [3] - 26:24, 36:17 42:23 **STATE**[1] - 42:3 USC [3] - 8:20, 8:25, trafficking [10] -27:9, 37:25 WITNESS [1] - 42:15 State [1] - 42:16 27:23 12:7, 12:8, 12:17, survive[1] - 21:4 witnesses [2] statement [1] - 35:25 15:21, 22:16, 29:19, user [2] - 19:17, 39:12, 39:21 States [4] - 3:22, 31:9, 32:10, 35:11, 19:23 Т words [6] - 6:18, 12:2. 12:12. 33:19 36.15 users [7] - 13:8, 13:11, 20:5, 26:14, **STATES**[1] - 1:3 13:17, 13:24, 30:20, transcribed [1] -29:5, 37:9 table [1] - 3:17 30:24, 31:7, 31:8 statute [18] - 9:13, 42:6 works [2] - 17:12, talks [8] - 10:21, utilize [1] - 37:9 20:23, 21:6, 22:13, Transcribed [1] -37:8 12:13, 15:13, 22:21, 22:21, 25:23, 26:13, 1:20 world [3] - 16:14, 34:11, 35:25, 37:7, ٧ 26:20, 27:3, 27:4, treated [2] - 19:18, 16:15 37:13 28:15, 28:24, 29:7, 20:22 written [3] - 3:22, target [1] - 37:9 29:8, 31:15, 34:19, trouble [1] - 32:3 valuable [1] - 5:23 12:18, 27:8 teenage [1] - 4:3 35:5, 38:6 true [4] - 8:2, 30:17, value [4] - 29:17, wrote [2] - 11:21, tend [1] - 23:2 statute's [1] - 27:12 30:19, 42:9 32:5, 35:24, 36:11 15:13 terms [3] - 10:16, statutes [5] - 9:23, trying [2] - 24:19, various [1] - 12:19 36:23, 40:20 9:25, 10:5, 12:4, 21:6 38:17 Υ veil [1] - 17:14 testimony [1] - 39:10 **statutory** [9] - 8:7, turn [1] - 8:19 venture [8] - 14:10, text [2] - 17:4, 29:13 10:17, 11:25, 12:6, **TVPRA**[1] - 31:18 15:20, 22:15, 29:18, textual [1] - 17:3 26:6, 26:7, 26:12, twisted [1] - 38:4 Yards [1] - 2:6 32:6, 32:10, 35:11, **THE** [2] - 1:3 35.2 **two** [4] - 10:5, 19:7, year [4] - 23:20, 35:16 theatre [1] - 6:7 still [5] - 5:8, 22:9, 21:7, 37:10 24:9, 24:23, 25:14 ventures [1] - 36:15 27:7, 28:11, 38:9 themselves [1] -Twombly [2] - 21:9, years [3] - 12:23, venue [2] - 5:4, 6:7 stop [2] - 6:11 29:15 17:22, 32:8 verification [2] they've [2] - 15:8, stopped [1] - 7:23 type [3] - 19:21, YORK [1] - 42:3 6:25, 12:13 strange [1] - 11:9 36:13 21:8, 23:9 York [5] - 1:23, 2:7, versus [7] - 3:8, third [8] - 3:8, 4:8, strangers [6] - 4:12, types [1] - 27:6 42:16, 42:24 3:23, 12:2, 12:12, 4:10, 4:22, 4:23, 5:5, 6:5, 11:2, 11:3, young [3] - 4:2, 15:14, 27:2, 33:19 19:10, 19:23 11.7 U 11:24, 12:9 videos [2] - 36:7, third-party [6] - 4:8, Street [1] - 1:22 37:4 4:10, 4:22, 4:23, strong [1] - 34:23 ubiquitous [1] - 36:5 **violate** [2] - 7:13, 19:23 stuck [1] - 31:24 28:24 UN [1] - 36:24 thousand [3] - 23:20, study [2] - 24:5 violated [2] - 31:15, under [17] - 9:10, 24:23, 25:14 stuff [2] - 22:14, 35:9 10:14, 17:21, 17:22, 31:19 thousands [2] - 38:8 styled [1] - 42:7 24:14 24:15 violates [1] - 28:3 three [1] - 18:23 subject [1] - 22:8