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# **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**COMMITTEES**

**Cyber-Safety Committee**

**Report**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 6 July 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Speaker** Marino, Nola, MP

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**Ms MARINO** (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (12:07): Unlike the member for Moreton, who was part of the whole process of creation of this report, I am a recent member of the cyber safety committee. Because it is an area in which I have a genuine interest and engagement, I am delighted to talk about the committee report, *The highwire act: cyber safety and the young*. I, like the previous speaker, want to acknowledge the chair, the deputy chair and the committee, who all did so much work on this report. It is a very good piece of work.

The previous speakers have spoken about the importance of cyber safety, particularly for young people. I am pleased that within the report there is acknowledgement of the need to engage with people at a very young age. This is really important. They need to be aware and alert. They are engaged with the internet at a very young age. They are, as we know, very savvy in this world. Not only that, they are very keen at a very young age to engage. But in doing so we have to make sure that they are aware, alert and protected. A lot of what is in this report reflects that intent, with some practical measures suggested to assist in that.

This year, it is important that we communicate directly with young people, as the committee did. We need to learn how they manage their issues and how they see things. That is a key part of why the recommendations out of this report will be useful and valuable, because young people have said, 'This is what we need; this is the world we're in.' I hope that the minister does respond to that, because the young people have said what they need and how they need things done. That engagement with young people is very important. I have a youth reference group that I meet on regular occasions. Interestingly, this year cybersafety was highlighted as one of the most important issues these young people are facing. Admittedly, this is an older age group, covering years 10 through 12. They raised really serious issues with me about online safety and even about being comfortable online. The use of social media sites is as much a threat to them and a challenge for them to deal with as it is an opportunity to engage and to be part of what young people do.

When you listen to young people it is interesting to learn that some of the things that come up on Facebook are not necessarily the things they want. The young people made me very aware of some of the Facebook issues, such as 'sexting', when we were having our discussion. Given their exposure to online scams and self-harm websites and the fact that they could be drawn into engaging with these sorts of websites and the behaviour that goes with that, they were very keen that education should start very young.

One thing that really concerned me was that cyberbullying happens 24 hours a day, seven days a week for some of our young people. That in itself is a major challenge. Those of us who were perhaps subjected to physical bullying were able to get away from it. However, a young person can become the target of cyberbullying that is then circulated to others. It is like a pack dog mentality whereby everybody gets involved and picks on that young person. It can create major social and emotional problems for that young person. Those who are picked on—to put it bluntly—in physical life can be the same young people who are very susceptible to being bullied online as well. They are quite vulnerable.

The young people told me that they were often concerned about talking to an adult about the fact that they were being bullied on the cyberscene. Whether it was their mobile phone with internet connection, their own computer or access to the internet at home, they did not want to lose that connection. One of the barriers to these young people getting the help they needed was the fact that they were often too scared to tell their mum or dad because they did not want to lose access. They were worried that that was how their mum and dad would react—that they would say, 'If that's what happening to you online then you just can't use it.' And of course it is so important to them for so many reasons, so often they do not engage with their parents or others in authority when this happens.

We need to give young people the tools to manage this themselves. I think it would be fantastic if there were more younger people actually delivering cybersafety messages to other young people, telling them: 'This is what happens in your world. This is what we do online. This is us on Facebook. Here is our page, and this is what

you can and can't or should and shouldn't be doing.' All of those things matter to young people. They actually want to know what they can and cannot do safely.

I went to one of my primary schools and asked the young people there how many were on Facebook. These are children under the age of 12. We know that they are supposed to be over 13 to be on Facebook, but 75 per cent of the young people in that class put their hands up. They were all on Facebook. I asked them, 'How old are you saying you are when you sign up to be on Facebook?' Some of them said 16, and some said 18. Those children would be in receipt of inappropriate content as a result of that. Also, they were not aware that Facebook owns the photos, the words and everything else they put on Facebook. I hate to say it, but just as so many men do not read the fine print—more men than women do not read the fine print—the situation is the same with young boys on Facebook. More of the young girls were aware that Facebook owned everything they put on that website, such as photos, but the young boys were not as aware. A lot of young people were not aware that, despite the fact that they had deleted something, that material was still out there and would be there forever.

I heard different stories about young people's experiences on Facebook. I even spoke to some parents who would take photos of their children in their school uniforms and put them on Facebook. Any mature age predator would then know exactly what school that young person was going to and where they could access them if they chose to. So there are a range of issues that we need to manage.

But it is not just the physical side, which is something that young people on Facebook do not understand. I asked one young school child how many friends they had on Facebook, and it was almost like a competition—I need to be the one with the most. But, in being the one with the most, the risk is greater. I asked them, 'Do you actually know all these people?' 'Yes,' they replied, 'because they are my friends.' I asked, 'Do you know whether it is a 60 year-old person or a person of your own age?' The answer was that, no, they did not know. These were the simple things that a young person under the age of 12 was not necessarily aware of. Because they are young and innocent they assumed that everybody they accepted as a friend was indeed a friend and of the same age as them, which quite often they were not.

But it was not just that. I asked them, 'What do you talk about online with these 500 friends?' as one young person had. They replied, 'We talk about home and about mum and dad. We talk about when we are going on holidays. And we might talk about the fact that grandma cannot come and look after the house while we are away.' They would talk about when it was their birthday, when it was mum's or dad's birthday and who grandma was. Over a period of time these young people will be far more at risk of identity theft than they currently are, because collating the information they have in all innocence provided will give others an opportunity to steal their identity after they get their first credit card. Someone may collect enough information to change their password.

So there are some real issues facing young people, which we may not have had to face, out there alive and well. That is just on the Facebook side of things and perhaps on other social websites. But then there is the issue of using the internet for online banking or the myriad other things people might do online.

Equally, I have concerns about sexting. It is a major issue that has a very concerning impact on young people. At some stage, perhaps when they are at high school, they will have a special friendship with another young person that they may both believe is a very genuine relationship and they may send photos of parts of themselves to each other. But by one avenue or another those images can end up in the broader public arena, and that can do an incredible amount of damage. I had evidence from families of how it has destroyed young people and the value they place in themselves.

An employer once rang me, asking what to do about the fact that he had just received a photo showing a 16-year-old employee completely naked. According to the Australian Federal Police, if the individual saves or passes on that particular photo they are engaging in child pornography, which is a federal offence. So these are the issues. The employer was also concerned that every other member of the staff had received the photo. For that young person, who probably in all innocence provided those photos to someone, they will be there forever.

Of the work done by the committee, recommendations 1 to 3 in the report are very important. I am hoping that the minister follows many of those. I encourage all of us in our roles in parliament to do our best out in the community to inform and educate young people and keep them aware and alert. I encourage members to read this report and think how you can do something like that for the people you meet. Again, I like the idea of young people engaging with other young people, because they will take so much more notice of that.

I go to schools and meet fabulous young people with all the good intentions in the world and they want information and to be safe. They want to be aware and alert but they want to use this medium and they are going to. Part of what we need to do with this report is give them the tools to be safe, aware and alert in a way that will carry through to mature age. When they start doing tax and banking online it could evolve into online security that is a lifetime commitment. That is equally as important. I was involved in a previous inquiry where we heard so many stories of mature-age people who were subject to various forms of online scams and attacks. Right throughout the community now, I would think that every member in this place is seeing constantly in the papers the latest report about a young person on a social website. It was brought up so often by these young people from high schools as being something that influenced how happy or not they were at school and how they could cope in their life simply through this cyberworld that they live in and the actual damage that could be done to them in an emotional and physical sense.

This is a very timely report. As I said, it is extremely relevant, and the engagement of young people is critical to the results that this report has delivered. I would, again, commend all of the committee who were so involved in it. I see this as an opportunity to help young people deal with the issues that they have. I commend the report, the chair, the deputy chair and everyone involved. I am hoping that this report will be the beginning of engaging young people in a direct sense in their own safety and in their own futures in whatever way they engage with the internet and that when they are online they are able to enjoy it and be safe and protected and can pass that knowledge onto others.

The one thing I say to young people is to pay attention if they see a young person around them at school or wherever they are in a social sense and see them receive a message and either go very quiet and not want to read that message in front of them or go to the toilet or somewhere else and then come out visibly upset. We have a good program in Western Australia on other matters with young people that is called 'Are You Okay?' I say to these young people, 'Be prepared to ask your mates: are you okay? When you see them visibly upset when they receive a message—be it a computer message or other message—just ask them whether they are okay because quite often they are not and they just might need you to ask that question and encourage them to get support, whether it is from you or from someone else who can help but not someone that they would perhaps fear would take away the technology that is often their link to being mature, their link to the world and their link to engaging. That is all part of this report. I commend it to the House.