

United States Senate

HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 112
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0505
(202) 224-3553
<http://boxer.senate.gov>

May 17, 2016

The Honorable Loretta E. Lynch
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

I am writing to express concern about the growing issue of online sexual assault and to urge the Department of Justice to begin specifically tracking criminal offenses involving acts of "sextortion."

A Brookings Institution report released last week describes in horrifying detail how criminals are using the Internet to sexually extort victims online. In what is often referred to as sextortion, attackers use compromising information – usually in the form of sexually explicit images or videos – to force victims to engage in sexual activity online. For example, some criminals have hacked into victims' computers, secretly recorded explicit videos of them, and then threatened to post the footage on social media if the victims do not agree to send additional sexual material.

While the attacks may be virtual, the damage is not. These experiences can have traumatic, lifelong psychological consequences. The Brookings report notes that victims of sextortion "spend every moment in fear of the next message demanding more compromising pictures or videos, living in perpetual anxiety of the risk of public exposure." In at least one case, sextortion drove a female victim to attempt suicide.

Court records show that some of these cyber-criminals have blackmailed hundreds of different victims online. However, since specific data is not collected by any federal entity on online sexual extortion, the full extent of this crime is largely unknown. In an attempt to better understand and address these serious threats facing women, men and children on the Internet, please provide information outlining the efforts the Department of Justice is taking to collect this critical data.

Thank you so much for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator