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Summary: Sexual Exploitation of a Minor, morphed images

**HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

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**VERSIONS OF THIS BILL**

[12/05/2024](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess126_2025-2026/prever/3046_20241205.docx)

A bill

TO AMEND THE SOUTH CAROLINA CODE OF LAWS BY AMENDING SECTION 16‑15‑375, RELATING TO DEFINITIONS APPLICABLE TO CERTAIN OFFENSES AGAINST MINORS, SO AS TO REVISE DEFINITIONS AND ADD THE TERMS “IDENTIFIABLE MINOR” AND “MORPHED IMAGE”; BY AMENDING SECTION 16‑15‑395, RELATING TO FIRST DEGREE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF A MINOR, SO AS TO INCLUDE MORPHED IMAGES OF IDENTIFIABLE MINORS AS AN OFFENSE; BY AMENDING SECTION 16‑15‑405, RELATING TO SECOND DEGREE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF A MINOR, SO AS TO INCLUDE MORPHED IMAGES OF IDENTIFIABLE MINORS AS AN OFFENSE; BY AMENDING SECTION 16‑15‑410, RELATING TO THIRD DEGREE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF A MINOR; SO AS TO INCLUDE MORPHED IMAGES OF IDENTIFIABLE MINORS AS AN OFFENSE; BY AMENDING SECTION 23‑3‑430, RELATING TO THE SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY, SO AS TO INCLUDE THOSE GUILTY OF CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION OF A MINOR IN THE FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD DEGREE AS A TIER II OFFENDER; BY AMENDING SECTION 23‑3‑462, RELATING TO TERMINATION OF REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS, SO AS TO CLARIFY POSSIBLE TERMINATION REQUIREMENTS AND INCLUDE TIER I AND TIER II DESIGNATIONS FOR OUT‑OF‑STATE OR FEDERAL CONVICTIONS; AND BY AMENDING SECTION 16‑15‑342, RELATING TO CRIMINAL SOLICITATION OF A MINOR, BY AMENDING SECTION 16‑15‑387, RELATING TO EMPLOYMENT OF A PERSON UNDER EIGHTEEN TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC IN A STATE OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT NUDITY, AND BY AMENDING SECTION 44‑48‑30, RELATING TO DEFINITIONS FOR PURPOSES OF THE SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR ACT, ALL SO AS TO MAKE CONFORMING CHANGES.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Section 16‑15‑375 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 Section 16‑15‑375. The following definitions apply to Section 16‑15‑385, disseminating or exhibiting to minors harmful material or performances; Section 16‑15‑387, employing a person under the age of eighteen years to appear in a state of sexually explicit nudity in a public place; Section 16‑15‑395, first degree sexual exploitation of a minor; Section 16‑15‑405, second degree sexual exploitation of a minor; Section 16‑15‑410, third degree sexual exploitation of a minor; Section 16‑15‑415, promoting prostitution of a minor; and Section 16‑15‑425, participating in prostitution of a minor.

 (1) “Harmful to minors” means that quality of any material or performance that depicts sexually explicit nudity or sexual activity and that, taken as a whole, has the following characteristics:

 (a) the average adult person applying contemporary community standards would find that the material or performance has a predominant tendency to appeal to a prurient interest of minors in sex; and

 (b) the average adult person applying contemporary community standards would find that the depiction of sexually explicit nudity or sexual activity in the material or performance is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the adult community concerning what is suitable for minors; and

 (c) to a reasonable person, the material or performance taken as a whole lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors.

 (2) “Identifiable minor”

 (a) means a person who:

 (i) was a minor at the time the image was created, adapted, or modified, or whose image as a minor was used in the creating, adapting, or modifying of the image; and

 (ii) is recognizable as an actual person by the person’s face, likeness, or other distinguishing characteristic, such as a unique birthmark, or other recognizable feature;

 (b) shall not be construed to require proof of the actual identity of the identifiable minor.

 (2)(3) “Material” means pictures, drawings, video recordings, films, digital electronic files, computer generated images or pictures, or other visual depictions or representations but not material consisting entirely of written words.

 (3)(4) “Minor” means an individual who is less than eighteen years old.

 (5) “Morphed image” means any visual depiction or representation, including any photograph, film, video, picture, or computer or computer‑generated image or picture, whether made or produced by electronic, mechanical, or other means, of sexually explicit conduct, where such visual depiction or representation has been created, adapted, or modified to appear that an identifiable minor is engaging in sexual conduct or sexually explicit activity or appearing in a state of sexually explicit nudity.

 (4)(6) “Prostitution” means engaging or offering to engage in sexual activity with or for another in exchange for anything of value.

 (5)(7) “Sexual activity” includes any of the following acts or simulations thereof:

 (a) masturbation, whether done alone or with another human or animal;

 (b) vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse, whether done with another human or an animal;

 (c) touching, in an act of apparent sexual stimulation or sexual abuse, of the clothed or unclothed genitals, pubic area, or buttocks of another person or the clothed or unclothed breasts of a human female;

 (d) an act or condition that depicts bestiality, sado‑masochistic abuse, meaning flagellation or torture by or upon a person who is nude or clad in undergarments or in a costume which reveals the pubic hair, anus, vulva, genitals, or female breast nipples, or the condition of being fettered, bound, or otherwise physically restrained on the part of the one so clothed;

 (e) excretory functions;

 (f) the insertion of any part of a person’s body, other than the male sexual organ, or of any object into another person’s anus or vagina, except when done as part of a recognized medical procedure.

 (6)(8) “Sexually explicit nudity” means the showing of:

 (a) uncovered, or less than opaquely covered human genitals, pubic area, or buttocks, or the nipple or any portion of the areola of the human female breast; or

 (b) covered human male genitals in a discernibly turgid state.

SECTION 2.A. Section 16‑15‑395(A) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (A) An individual commits the offense of first degree sexual exploitation of a minor if, knowing the character or content of the material or performance, he:

 (1) uses, employs, induces, coerces, encourages, or facilitates a minor to engage in or assist others to engage in sexual activity or appear in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation for a live performance or for the purpose of producing material that contains a visual representation depicting this activity or a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation;

 (2) permits a minor under his custody or control to engage in sexual activity or appear in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation for a live performance or for the purpose of producing material that contains a visual representation depicting this activity or a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation;

 (3) transports or finances the transportation of a minor through or across this State with the intent that the minor engage in sexual activity or appear in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation for a live performance or for the purpose of producing material that contains a visual representation depicting this activity or a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation; or

 (4) records, photographs, films, develops, duplicates, produces, or creates a digital electronic file for sale or pecuniary gain material that contains a visual representation depicting a minor or a morphed image of an identifiable minor engaged in sexual activity or a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation.

B. Section 16‑15‑395 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

 (E) The offense is a misdemeanor to be heard by the family court if the person charged under the provisions of subsection (A)(4) is a minor and the offense is the minor’s first offense related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor. The family court may order behavioral health counseling from an appropriate agency or provider as a condition of adjudicating a minor.

SECTION 3.A. Section 16‑15‑405(A) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (A) An individual commits the offense of second degree sexual exploitation of a minor if, knowing the character or content of the material, he:

 (1) records, photographs, films, develops, duplicates, produces, or creates digital electronic file material that contains a visual representation of a minor or a morphed image of an identifiable minor engaged in sexual activity or appearing in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation; or

 (2) distributes, transports, exhibits, receives, sells, purchases, exchanges, or solicits material that contains a visual representation of a minor or a morphed image of an identifiable minor engaged in sexual activity or appearing in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation.

B. Section 16‑15‑405 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

 (E) The offense is a misdemeanor to be heard by the family court if the person charged under the provisions of subsection (A) is a minor and the offense is the minor’s first charge related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor. The family court may order behavioral health counseling from an appropriate agency or provider, as a condition of adjudicating a minor.

SECTION 4.A. Section 16‑15‑410(A) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (A) An individual commits the offense of third degree sexual exploitation of a minor if, knowing the character or content of the material, he possesses material that contains a visual representation of a minor or a morphed image of an identifiable minor engaging in sexual activity or appearing in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation.

B. Section 16‑15‑410(D) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (D) This section does not apply to an employee of a law enforcement agency, including the State Law Enforcement Division, a prosecuting agency, including the South Carolina Attorney General’s Office, or the South Carolina Department of Corrections who, while acting within the employee’s official capacity in the course of an investigation or criminal proceeding, is in possession of material that contains a visual representation of a minor engaging in sexual activity or appearing in a state of sexually explicit nudity when a reasonable person would infer the purpose is sexual stimulation. The employee’s official capacity in the course of such investigation or criminal proceeding includes making materials available for inspection to the defendant’s counsel in response to discovery requests.

C. Section 16‑15‑410 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

 (E) The offense is a misdemeanor to be heard by the family court if the person charged under the provisions of subsection (A) is a minor and the offense is the minor’s first offense related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor. The family court may order behavioral health counseling from an appropriate agency or provider, as a condition of adjudicating a minor.

SECTION 5. Section 23‑3‑430(C)(1) and (2) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (1) For purposes of this article, a person who has been convicted of, or pled guilty or nolo contendere to any of the following offenses shall be referred to as a Tier I offender:

 (a) criminal sexual conduct in the third degree (Section 16‑3‑654);

 (b) kidnapping (Section 16‑3‑910) of a person eighteen years of age or older except when the court makes a finding on the record that the offense did not include a criminal sexual offense or an attempted criminal sexual offense;

 (c) incest (Section 16‑15‑20);

 (d) buggery (Section 16‑15‑120);

 (e) peeping, voyeurism, or aggravated voyeurism (Section 16‑17‑470);

 (f) a person, regardless of age, who has been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere in this State, or who has been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere in a comparable court in the United States, or who has been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere in the United States federal courts of indecent exposure or of a similar offense in other jurisdictions is required to register pursuant to the provisions of this article if the court makes a specific finding on the record that, based on the circumstances of the case, the convicted person should register as a sex offender;

 (g) sexual intercourse with a patient or trainee (Section 44‑23‑1150);

 (h) administering, distributing, dispensing, delivering, or aiding, abetting, attempting, or conspiring to administer, distribute, dispense, or deliver a controlled substance or gamma hydroxy butyrate to an individual with the intent to commit a crime listed in Section 44‑53‑370(f), except petit larceny or grand larceny;

 (i) any other offense as described in Section 23‑3‑430(D), or

 (j) any other offense required by Title I of the federal Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 (Pub. L. 109‑248), the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA).;

 (k) criminal sexual exploitation of a minor, first degree (Section 16‑15‑395), provided the offense is related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor. If the offender is under eighteen years of age and the offense is related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor, the adjudicated minor is not an offender and is not required to register pursuant to the provisions of this article;

 (l) criminal sexual exploitation of a minor, second degree (Section 16‑15‑405), provided the offense is related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor. If the offender is under eighteen years of age and the offense is related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor, the adjudicated minor is not an offender and is not required to register pursuant to the provisions of this article; or

 (m) criminal sexual exploitation of a minor, third degree (Section 16‑15‑410); provided the offense is related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor. If the offender is under eighteen years of age and the offense is related to a morphed image of an identifiable minor, the adjudicated minor is not an offender and is not required to register pursuant to the provisions of this article.

 (2) For purposes of this article, a person who has been convicted of, or pled guilty or nolo contendere to any of the following offenses shall be referred to as a Tier II offender:

 (a) criminal sexual conduct in the second degree (Section 16‑3‑653);

 (b) engaging a child for sexual performance (Section 16‑3‑810);

 (c) producing, directing, or promoting sexual performance by a child (Section 16‑3‑820);

 (d) trafficking in persons (Section 16‑3‑2020) except when the court makes a finding on the record that the offense did not include a criminal sexual offense or an attempted criminal sexual offense;

 (e) criminal sexual conduct with minors, second degree (Section 16‑3‑655(B)). If evidence is presented at the criminal proceeding, or in any court of competent jurisdiction, and the court makes a specific finding on the record that the conviction obtained for this offense resulted from consensual sexual conduct, as contained in Section 16‑3‑655(B)(2), provided the offender is eighteen years of age or less, or consensual sexual conduct between persons under sixteen years of age, the convicted person is not an offender and is not required to register pursuant to the provisions of this article;

 (f) criminal sexual conduct with minors, third degree (Section 16‑3‑655(C)). If evidence is presented at the criminal proceeding, or in any court of competent jurisdiction, and the court makes a specific finding on the record that the conviction obtained for this offense resulted from consensual sexual conduct, as contained in Section 16‑3‑655(B)(2), provided the offender is eighteen years of age or less, or consensual sexual conduct between persons under sixteen years of age, the convicted person is not an offender and is not required to register pursuant to the provisions of this article;

 (g) criminal solicitation of a minor if the purpose or intent of the solicitation or attempted solicitation was to:

 (i) persuade, induce, entice, or coerce the person solicited to engage or participate in sexual activity as defined in Section 16‑15‑375(5);

 (ii) perform a sexual activity in the presence of the person solicited (Section 16‑15‑342); or

 (h) violations of Article 3, Chapter 15, Title 16 involving a minor.;

 (i) sexual exploitation of a minor, first degree (Section 16‑15‑395), except as otherwise provided in this article;

 (j) sexual exploitation of a minor, second degree (Section 16‑15‑405), except as otherwise provided in this article; or

 (k) sexual exploitation of a minor, third degree (Section 16‑15‑410), except as otherwise provided in this article.

SECTION 6. Section 23‑3‑462(A) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (A) After successful completion of the requirements of this section, an offender may apply to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division for the termination of the requirements of registration pursuant to this article. If it is determined that the offender has met the requirements of this section, SLED shall remove the offender’s name and identifying information from the sex offender registry and shall notify the offender within one hundred twenty days that the offender has been relieved of the registration requirements of this article.

 (1) An offender may file a request for termination of the requirement of registration with SLED, in a form and process established by the agency:

 (a) after fifteen years of having been registered for at least fifteen years , or after fifteen years from the date of discharge from incarceration without supervision or the termination of active supervision of probation, parole, or any other alternative to incarceration, if the offender was required to register based on an adjudication of delinquency or the offender was required to register asis a Tier I offender;

 (b) after twenty‑five years of having been registered for at least twenty‑five years, or after twenty‑five years from the date of discharge from incarceration without supervision or the termination of active supervision of probation, parole, or any other active alternative to incarceration, if the offender was convicted as an adult, and was required to register asis a Tier II offender;

 (c) ana Tier I or Tier II offender who was required to register as an offender because of a conviction in another state or because of a federal conviction may apply to be removed from the requirements of the registry if he is eligible to be removed under the laws of the jurisdiction where the conviction occurred.

 (2) An offender who was convicted as an adult, and who is required to register as a Tier III offender may not file a request for termination of registration with SLED nor shall any such request be granted pursuant to this subsection.

 (3) The requesting offender must have successfully completed all sex offender treatment programs that have been required.

 (4) The requesting offender must not have been convicted of failure to register within the previous ten years.

 (5) The offender must not have been convicted of any additional sexual offense or violent sexual offense after being placed on the registry.

 (6) A filing fee, as set by SLED but not to exceed two hundred fifty dollars, shall be paid to file the request for termination of registration requirements. The initial application may be filed with SLED and the administrative review may begin one hundred twenty days prior to the date specified in subsection (A)(1); however, any removal may not occur prior to the date specified.

SECTION 7.A. Section 16‑15‑342(A) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (A) A person eighteen years of age or older commits the offense of criminal solicitation of a minor if he knowingly contacts or communicates with, or attempts to contact or communicate with, a person who is under the age of eighteen, or a person reasonably believed to be under the age of eighteen, for the purpose of or with the intent of persuading, inducing, enticing, or coercing the person to engage or participate in a sexual activity as defined in Section 16‑15‑375(5) or a violent crime as defined in Section 16‑1‑60, or with the intent to perform a sexual activity in the presence of the person under the age of eighteen, or person reasonably believed to be under the age of eighteen.

B. Section 16‑15‑387(A) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (A) It is unlawful for a person to employ a person under the age of eighteen years to appear in a state of sexually explicit nudity, as defined in Section 16‑15‑375(6), in a public place.

C. Section 44‑48‑30(2)(p)(i) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

 (i) persuade, induce, entice, or coerce the person solicited to engage or participate in sexual activity as defined in Section 16‑15‑375(5); or

SECTION 8. If any section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, sentence, clause, phrase, or word of this act is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such holding shall not affect the constitutionality or validity of the remaining portions of this act, the General Assembly hereby declaring that it would have passed this act, and each and every section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, sentence, clause, phrase, and word thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more other sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, sentences, clauses, phrases, or words hereof may be declared to be unconstitutional, invalid, or otherwise ineffective.

SECTION 9. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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