



ADVOCATING AGAINST  
ROMANCE SCAMMERS

[Advocating Against Romance Scammers Inc.](#)

*Advocating Briefing in Washington D.C.*

*March 22-23, 2023*

Two days of meetings, networking, introductions, and great promise. The following will thoroughly describe and summarize AARS's Co-Founders, Kathy Waters and Ret. Col. Bryan Denny, latest visit to Washington DC on behalf of online romance scams focusing on safer platforms, the recognition of monies and victims reported, and the latest romance/investment scam take-over that has rocked the United States the past year, Pig Butchering. We will give a detailed summary of each meeting in date and time order of when we convened, with honesty and precision in hopes you, too, felt as if you were in the same room.

PERSONAL NOTE: We would like to thank everyone we had the opportunity to speak with, meet for the first time, and listen to our work, stories, and need for safer platforms. AARS works daily to help protect individuals from being romance scammed, help guide survivors to the appropriate help (from reporting the crime to clinically licensed ran support groups), and help spread education, so you or your loved one does not succumb to the dreaded mental hijacking better known as online romance scams.

## **March 22, 2023**

### **10:00 AM-10:30 AM: Meeting with [Senator Alex Padilla's](#) Legislative Staff**



Pictured: Bryan Denny (Co-Founder of AARS), Kathy Waters (Co-Founder of AARS)

*ARTICLES PRESENTED: Folder containing AARS's Latest report, "Community Substandards", AARS February News Letter, AARS World Romance Scams Prevention Day Certificate, AARS Informational one pager AARS ANTISCAM GUIDE, 2022 Internet Crimes Complaint Center's*



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*numbers of reported victims and money losses from their Overall State Statistics and the Country as a whole, AARS brochure, Business cards of Co-Founders Kathy Waters and Bryan Denny.*

Senator Padilla's office had one legislative staff member in attendance. AARS Folder was presented and reviewed. Staff recommended AARS approach the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to speak on the need for safer platforms as they are the entity that enforces Social Media Platform laws. AARS explained in order for laws to be enforced, there must be a law to impose.

AARS educated on Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act's need for renovation, what the law presently legally allows and its ramifications regarding crimes online. The meeting was approximately thirty minutes in length and staff was receptive to all information given. A "thank you for meeting with us" email was sent on 3/25/2023.

AARS OVERALL TAKE OF MEETING: We felt the staff was aware of online romance scams and the need for additional platform safety. The team was engaging and supportive of the work AARS achieves.

## **12:00 PM-1:30 PM Luncheon with Alliance to Counter Crime Online (ACCO.)**



Pictured: Bryan Denny, Kathy Waters, Gretchen Peters (ACCO) Kathleen Miles (ACCO)

AARS has partnered with Alliance to Counter Crime Online ([ACCO](#)) since 2019. Due to Covid, a meeting with the team was far overdue. Kathy and Bryan finally met with ACCO's Founder and Executive Director, Gretchen Peters, and Founder of ACCO and Director of Analysis with CINCO Kathleen Miles. ACCO is a program of Cintoc, a registered 501(c)(3) that gathers experts who produce data and reports surrounding subjects of online crimes. Amongst the great conversation about the work that both NPOs do and can do, Gretchen and Kathleen were also very informative and helpful with additional connections.



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The following day consisted of Gretchen Peters testifying in front of the Subcommittee on National Security, Illicit Finance, and International Financial Institutions regarding The CCP's Business Model Fueling the Fentanyl Crisis. (Please see additional notes under March 23, Fentanyl Hearing).

### **2:00 PM- 2:35 PM- Meeting with [Senator Diane Feinstein's](#) Legislative Staff**

*ARTICLES PRESENTED: Folder containing AARS's Latest report, "Community Substandards", AARS February News Letter, AARS World Romance Scams Prevention Day Certificate, AARS Informational one pager AARS ANTISCAM GUIDE, 2022 Internet Crimes Complaint Center's numbers of reported victims and money losses from their Overall State Statistics and the Country as a whole, AARS brochure, Business cards of Co-Founders Kathy Waters and Bryan Denny.*

Senator Diane Feinstein had three legislative staff members in attendance. The AARS folder was presented and discussed. The staff was engaging and asked questions such as if social media ever informed us how much additional safety would cost, the work done through AARS, and if Bryan's photos continue to be used criminally across the social media platforms.

The meeting was approximately thirty minutes long, and the staff was receptive to all information given.

A "thank you for meeting with us" email was sent on 3/25/2023.

AARS OVERALL TAKE OF MEETING: The team we met with seemed very interested in our work to help victims. They understood the frustration with the length of time it takes to move forward bills and how crimes should not be committed upon the platforms. They also acknowledged the difficulty of amending a free speech law. Overall we felt Senator Feinstein's staff acknowledged all information given and understood the need for safer platforms. Will they move forward and support any bills written on platform safety? We are confident they would; however, taking the issue under their wing and championing a bill, we feel they will not.



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#### **4:00 PM- 4:45 PM- Meeting with [Senator Richard Durbin's](#) Legislative Staff**

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Senator Durbin's office included three legislative staff members. The AARS folder was presented and discussed. Staff directed us to also speak with the Commerce Committee as they also focus on social media users. When speaking of World Romance Scam Prevention Day, they

mentioned lawmakers may help announce special days in their newsletters; however, reaching out to the press offices would be the appropriate direction.

Another critical subject they brought up was looking into Intellectual Property and how Identity Theft Victims could "combat" from that standpoint since it is not covered within Section 230 of the CDA.

AARS OVERALL TAKE OF MEETING: Good and engaging. Like Feinstein's team, they, too, understand the frustration and difficulties with amending Section 230. We were thankful for the directions they presented to us, which we will be moving forward soon.

#### **7:30 PM- Meeting with Donna Gregory Unit Chief for the Internet Crimes Complaint Centers (IC3)**



Pictured: Bryan Denny, Donna Gregory (IC3), Kathy Waters

After a last-minute request to meet, Kathy and Bryan were pleased to have Ms. Gregory join us once she got into the D.C. area. Ms. Gregory spoke of the reports that come through to the [IC3](#) on a given day, the process the center follows regarding reports and distribution to the appropriate bureau offices, and the importance of reporting.



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We also touched on the fluctuation in scam numbers, with the BEC once leading in losses, with investment scams now taking the top spot (which she felt were approximately 75% due to the latest scams intertwined with romance scams called Pig Butchering). We spoke about #operationshamrock, the special team working on this project led by Cybercrime and Crypto Prosecutor Ms. Erin West.

We look forward to keeping in touch with Ms. Gregory, continuing the support and encouragement for all to report to the [IC3](#), and the latest report on cybercrimes affecting the elderly population, which Ms. Gregory state should be out within the next few weeks.

## **MARCH 23, 2023**

### **10:00 AM- Attended Hearing**



Pictured: First photo: Financial Services Committee Prior to hearing. Second photo: Gretchen Peters, Jaime Puerta, Bryan Denny, Kathy Waters. Third photo: Gretchen Peters presenting in front of the Financial Services Committee

Gretchen Peters, [ACCO](#) Founder, invited both Kathy and Bryan to attend the CCP's Business Model Fueling the Fentanyl Crisis hearing and support not just ACCO but a fellow partner Jaime Puerta Founder of the NPO, Victims of Illicit Drugs ([VOID](#)). It was an honor to be able to provide support to a fellow partner against the online crimes battle.

Additional introductions made with the Director of National Security Policy at U.S. House Financial Services Committee, Ret. Assistant Special Agent in Charge at Drug Enforcement Admin., Chairman Luetkemeyer of the Financial Services Committee, and several others. Many connections were interested in further conversations and possible invitations to testify on behalf of the online romance scams.



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## 11:00 AM- 11:45 AM- Meeting with [Congressman David Valadeo](#) and Legislative Staff, California



Pictured: Kathy Waters, Congressman David Valadeo, Bryan Denny

*ARTICLES PRESENTED: Folder containing AARS's Latest report, "Community Substandards", AARS February News Letter, AARS World Romance Scams Prevention Day Certificate, AARS*

*Informational one pager AARS ANTISCAM GUIDE, 2022 Internet Crimes Complaint Center's numbers of reported victims and money losses from their Overall State Statistics and the Country as a whole, AARS brochure, Business cards of Co-Founders Kathy Waters and Bryan Denny.*

Congressman Valadeo had one legislative staff member run the meeting while he also attended a large portion. The AARS folder was presented and discussed. AARS went into the meeting with the awareness that Congressman Valadeo was interested in doing a bill focusing on platform safety, particularly on dating sites. For a criminal focus, the legislative member felt that the fight would be best through state law; however, due to the majority of scams initiated outside of the United States and the crimes conducted on social media platforms, federal law is what is needed, which is why AARS has always focused on Federal meetings and law.

According to the legislative staff member, the topic of crimes against children or the elderly within a law is more likely for a bill to be recognized. We educated on the number of affected elderlies, which could be a route to take when creating a new bill. Congressman Valadeo and staff are open to writing a law supporting platform safety. They have talked with Rep. Kinzingers office about the wording in the bills (whom AARS also worked with) he created in hopes they can form something comparable, however, with greater traction.

The legislative staff member was happy to hear we had been speaking with some of the same businesses and organizations to help provide change. AARS was impressed to hear that the dating site Match Group, a contact AARS has also been in talks with, also participated in talks with the Congressional office.



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AARS OVERALL TAKE OF MEETING: The meeting was a great success. A champion in the making, hopefully. We will continue to keep close contact with the office and provide the education needed to make our platforms safer for all.

### **12:30 PM-2:00 PM Luncheon with Robert Zachariasiewicz**



Pictured: Bryan Denny, Kathy Waters, Robert Zachariasiewicz, Lisa Bezzant

Another great meet-up and connection for the future against romance scams. Mr. Zachariasiewicz, a previous Agent with the DEA's Special Operations Division, is now working on social media projects around serious crime issues, such as online romance scams. Our luncheon focused on victims of the crime, Mr. Zachariaseiwics law enforcement background, and his continued need to serve the citizens of the United States. Also in attendance was a friend of AARS and a Fresno County Sheriff's Department probation officer.

### **Overall Outcome**

When we can educate, how can we have a bad outcome? AARS not only met with some fantastic legislative staff members, but they also had the opportunity to engage with members of Congress, the Unit Chief at the Internet Crimes Complaint Center ([IC3](#)), join up with their partners at ACCO, and break bread with the man that took down Viktor Bout and now wants to move forward with a project on online romance scams. The latest D.C. visit was a very productive trip for the advocacy. Still, more importantly, for every scam survivor, scam victim that took their life because of the manipulation, and identity theft victim whose photos have

been stolen and used to manipulate the innocent. Also, let us not forget the loved ones who have educated, supported, and stood by those victimized by this horrible scam.

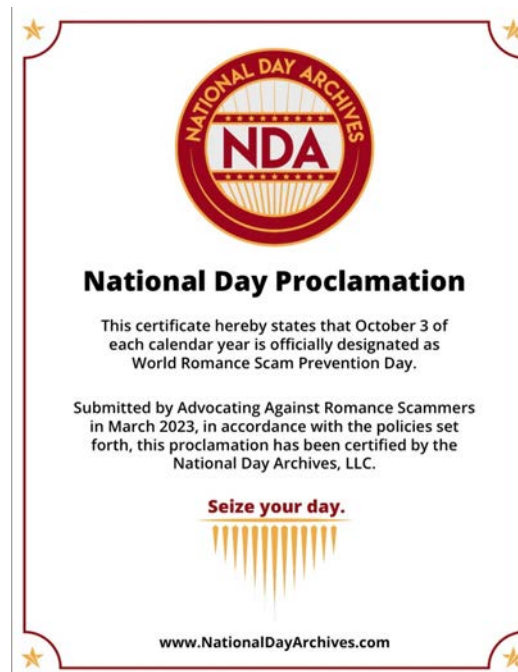


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## THE EXCITING NEWS/CONCLUSION...

In conclusion, as mentioned in the briefing, October 3 was officially named World Romance Scam Prevention Day on the [National Day Archives site](#)! We are thrilled to start working on this awareness day and gathering endorsers and sponsors! SO, MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The opportunity to educate became significantly stronger. We can't wait to acknowledge the day with our Online Romance Scam Prevention Family (advocating groups, law enforcement, tech companies, social media, mental health clinicians, and so much more)! More news to come, but if you would like to support our efforts moving forward, remember that we are a 501(c)(3), and all donations are tax-deductible!



[Donate Here!](#)