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**Testimony for SB0162**

**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Members of the Committee, it is my distinct honor and pleasure to offer some insights into S.B. 0162 regarding cyber safety for schools. The comments expressed in this statement reflect my views and not necessarily those of UMBC.

I testify in strong support for SB0162, which requires the creation of a guide and training course around cyber safety. My opinion is informed not just by my expertise in cybersecurity and social media analytics, but more importantly as a parent.

It is fairly uncontroversial to say that students need help navigating cyberspace in a safe manner, just like they do in the physical world. In the latter however, we have millennia of experience -- schools and parents teach children to be wary of strangers, to wash their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, to cover their sneezes, to behave well in social gatherings, and so on. These are all everyday small actions that increase safety and keep children from harm in the physical world.

Cyberspace is not just new, but rapidly evolving. A social media platform, or a particular way of handling phishing attacks that a parent may have learnt for their first child, is already outdated or changed by the time their next child is in a given grade. The situation is even more complex for educators with technology changing every 2-3 years! As such, it is difficult for parents and educators to be aware of all of the constantly evolving dangers of cyberspace. This limits their ability to teach children, in an age appropriate way, the "defensive driving" approach to their online activities. As such, the state creating some education materials and training that parents and educators can use, and that can be kept up to date, is important. This bill is an important step in that direction.

Many dangers of cyberspace are well known and extensively discussed, such as cyber bullying or ransomware. I will not belabor that discussion here. However, others are new and unique to cyberspace. It creates a private space where the child interacts with the world and its dangers. To all but the most technologically savvy parents, and sometimes even for them, limiting these interactions is very hard to virtually impossible. There have been several recent cases where children have been lured into sharing suggestive pictures, and then blackmailed into doing worse. Children's worldview is affected by seeing false and/or misleading information. It has even been suggested that social media interactions can create mental health issues, especially amongst teens.

Another new element in cyberspace is that it makes it very hard for the children, when they grow up, to "curate" their life. Information shared on social media is effectively out there forever, even on sites like snapchat which promise that messages are ephemeral. Sometimes this is just mundane things that people don't think twice about sharing (what school/camp you went to, what clubs were you in, who were your best friends, pictures of your first car). Out on the internet and for everyone to see, it reveals information that hackers can use to impersonate you and answer security questions online.

There is another dangerous element to the permanence of information in cyberspace. Children, before they develop full self control, may do very unadvisable things in their school years. Today, they or their peers share all things online, creating what is effectively a permanent record. These things, as funny or cool as they may appear to a ten, twelve or fifteen year old, can be devastating when seen by others later in life and out of context. A picture of a person drunk at a party, or joking about causing explosions in the

chemistry lab, can turn up years later when a prospective employer is thinking about making them a job offer.

It is therefore critical that we offer age appropriate “cyber hygiene” education early on, not just to children, but to parents and educators who are mentoring them. Just like elementary school kids are taught to be wary of strangers, they need to learn to be wary of emails or social media messages with links from strange people. As they grow up, they need to understand not just the obvious dangers in cyberspace, but subtle ones. This bill is an important step in that direction, and is to be commended. I urge you to support this bill.