



**Dr. Mary Jean Amon**

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**UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA**

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Maryland General Assembly

RE: HB0645: Social Media Platforms – Vloggers and Video Content Featuring Minors

Dear Chair,

I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Central Florida with research centered on how parents share their children's information online. I am writing to offer a research perspective on HB0645: Social Media Platforms – Vloggers and Video Content Featuring Minors, where much of the associated research documents broader community opinions regarding 'parental sharing.'

The majority the public has a smartphone with video camera capabilities, and it is typical for people to have their smartphones in hand, allowing for discreet recording. For this reason, anywhere a person goes there are risks related to *co-privacy*, or the ways in which people share other's sensitive images and information without permission. Along these lines, the general public reports being seriously concerned about the ways in which their personal information is shared on social media without consent. However, it is not stranger's social media sharing that other people are most concerned about; The public is generally more concerned with how their family, friends, and co-worker's might share their information without permission. That is because those familiar others have increased access to private information. By that logic, children are especially vulnerable to co-privacy violations, including when their parents share their information online. Children are defined as a vulnerable population, and there is a power differential between adults and kids, meaning it is debatable at what age children can truly consent to what information is shared and how. Young children, for instance, cannot fully grasp the consequences of sharing information in social media, with potential risks including bullying, harassment, identity theft, sexual predation, and having a digital footprint which is at odds with their future values. These social media risks increase when parental sharing occurs within large, public networks.

Certainly, many parents take precautions when sharing their children's information and do so in ways that benefit their family. However, it is important to acknowledge that those parents who share the most information about their kids online tend to do so larger public networks, are more likely to expose their children to social media at earlier ages, report higher levels of social media addiction, as well as more permissive parenting styles and confidence in parenting. These research findings from large online samples indicate that there are some parents who are *outliers* in how they are sharing and profiting from their children's information. In fact, there are parent influencers who primarily profit from sharing their children's images and information online.

Relating these findings to United States legislation, there is a well-known history of child exploitation in the entertainment industry, and now we have widely-adopted laws to address those cases of parental financial exploitation. With modern entertainment platforms like social media, we should take seriously that child influencers need protections, and that current child exploitation legislation may be out of date.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Jean Amon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "J".

Mary Jean Amon, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
University of Central Florida