

HOUSE BILL 952

I3, O4

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By: **Delegate Buckel**

Introduced and read first time: February 5, 2026

Assigned to: Economic Matters

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Consumer Protection – Companion Chatbots – Regulation**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring certain operators of companion chatbots to establish,
4 maintain, and publish certain protocols and provide certain information to users of
5 the companion chatbot; requiring operators to establish enhanced measures for
6 minor users of companion chatbots; requiring the Office of Suicide Prevention in the
7 Maryland Department of Health to annually publish certain data compiled from
8 operators; establishing that a violation of this Act is an unfair, abusive, or deceptive
9 trade practice subject to enforcement and penalty provisions under the Maryland
10 Consumer Protection Act; and generally relating to the regulation of companion
11 chatbots.

12 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
13 Article – Commercial Law
14 Section 13–301(14)(xlvii)
15 Annotated Code of Maryland
16 (2025 Replacement Volume)

17 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
18 Article – Commercial Law
19 Section 13–301(14)(xlviii)
20 Annotated Code of Maryland
21 (2025 Replacement Volume)

22 BY adding to
23 Article – Commercial Law
24 Section 13–301(14)(xlix) and 14–1330
25 Annotated Code of Maryland
26 (2025 Replacement Volume)

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Commercial Law

13–301.

Unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practices include any:

(14) Violation of a provision of:

(xlvii) Title 14, Subtitle 50 of this article; [or]

(xlviii) Section 13–411.1(c)(2) of the Transportation Article; or

(XLIX) SECTION 14–1330 OF THIS ARTICLE; OR

14–1330.

**(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS
INDICATED.**

**(2) “ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN §
3.5–801 OF THE STATE FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT ARTICLE.**

**(3) (I) “COMPANION CHATBOT” MEANS AN ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM WITH A NATURAL LANGUAGE INTERFACE THAT PROVIDES
ADAPTIVE, HUMAN–LIKE RESPONSES TO USER INPUTS AND IS CAPABLE OF MEETING
A USER’S SOCIAL NEEDS, INCLUDING BY EXHIBITING ANTHROPOMORPHIC
FEATURES AND BEING ABLE TO SUSTAIN A RELATIONSHIP ACROSS MULTIPLE
INTERACTIONS.**

(II) “COMPANION CHATBOT” DOES NOT INCLUDE:

**1. A BOT THAT IS USED BY A BUSINESS ENTITY ONLY FOR
CUSTOMER SERVICE, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, BUSINESS ANALYTICS, OR INTERNAL
RESEARCH;**

2. A BOT THAT:

A. IS A FEATURE OF A VIDEO GAME;

**B. IS LIMITED TO REPLIES RELATED TO THE VIDEO
GAME; AND**

C. DOES NOT SHARE CONTENT RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH, SELF-HARM, SUICIDAL IDEATION, SUICIDE, OR SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONDUCT; OR

3. A CONSUMER ELECTRONIC DEVICE THAT:

A. FUNCTIONS AS A SPEAKER AND A VOICE COMMAND INTERFACE;

B. ACTS AS A VOICE-ACTIVATED VIRTUAL ASSISTANT;

C. DOES NOT SUSTAIN A RELATIONSHIP ACROSS MULTIPLE INTERACTIONS; AND

D. DOES NOT GENERATE OUTPUTS THAT ARE LIKELY TO ELICIT EMOTIONAL RESPONSES FROM THE USER.

(4) “MINOR USER” MEANS A USER OF A COMPANION CHATBOT THAT AN OPERATOR KNOWS OR REASONABLY SHOULD KNOW IS A MINOR.

(5) “OFFICE” MEANS THE OFFICE OF SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.

(6) “OPERATOR” MEANS A PERSON WHO MAKES A COMPANION CHATBOT AVAILABLE TO A USER IN THE STATE.

(7) “SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONDUCT” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 18 U.S.C. § 2256.

(8) “VIDEO GAME” MEANS A GAME PLAYED ON AN ELECTRONIC DEVICE THAT:

(I) UTILIZES A COMPUTER, A MICROPROCESSOR, OR SIMILAR ELECTRONIC CIRCUITRY AND A MONITOR, OR THAT IS DESIGNED TO BE PLAYED USING A TELEVISION OR A COMPUTER MONITOR; AND

(II) INTERACTS WITH THE INDIVIDUAL PLAYING THE GAME, INCLUDING THROUGH A CHATBOT.

(B) (1) AN OPERATOR SHALL ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A PROTOCOL FOR PREVENTING A COMPANION CHATBOT FROM PRODUCING OR PRESENTING CONTENT CONCERNING SELF-HARM, SUICIDAL IDEATION, OR SUICIDE TO A USER

1 WHO EXPRESSES THOUGHTS OF SELF-HARM OR SUICIDAL IDEATION TO THE
2 COMPANION CHATBOT.

3 (2) THE PROTOCOL REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS
4 SUBSECTION SHALL INCLUDE A NOTIFICATION TO A USER WHO EXPRESSES
5 THOUGHTS OF SELF-HARM OR SUICIDAL IDEATION THAT REFERS THE USER TO A
6 CRISIS SERVICE PROVIDER, INCLUDING:

7 (I) THE MARYLAND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE
8 SYSTEM; AND

9 (II) THE NATIONAL 9-8-8 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE.

10 (3) AN OPERATOR SHALL USE EVIDENCE-BASED METHODS FOR
11 DETECTING WHEN A USER IS EXPRESSING THOUGHTS OF SELF-HARM OR SUICIDAL
12 IDEATION TO A COMPANION CHATBOT.

13 (4) AN OPERATOR SHALL PUBLISH THE PROTOCOL REQUIRED UNDER
14 PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION ON THE OPERATOR'S WEBSITE.

15 (C) (1) AN OPERATOR SHALL ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A PROTOCOL
16 FOR PREVENTING A COMPANION CHATBOT FROM PRODUCING OR PRESENTING TO A
17 MINOR USER CONTENT CONCERNING SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONDUCT, INCLUDING:

18 (I) VISUAL DEPICTIONS OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONDUCT; AND

19 (II) CONTENT SUGGESTING THAT THE MINOR USER SHOULD
20 ENGAGE IN SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONDUCT.

21 (2) AN OPERATOR SHALL PUBLISH THE PROTOCOL REQUIRED UNDER
22 PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION ON THE OPERATOR'S WEBSITE.

23 (D) AN OPERATOR SHALL DISPLAY A CLEAR AND CONSPICUOUS WARNING
24 TO A USER STATING THAT COMPANION CHATBOTS:

25 (1) ARE ARTIFICIALLY GENERATED AND NOT HUMAN; AND

26 (2) MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR SOME MINORS.

27 (E) AN OPERATOR SHALL DISPLAY TO A MINOR USER A CLEAR AND
28 CONSPICUOUS WARNING AFTER 3 HOURS OF CONSECUTIVE USE, AND EVERY 3
29 HOURS THEREAFTER:

1 **(1) STATING THAT COMPANION CHATBOTS ARE ARTIFICIALLY**
2 **GENERATED AND NOT HUMAN; AND**

3 **(2) RECOMMENDING THAT THE USER TAKE A BREAK FROM USING THE**
4 **COMPANION CHATBOT.**

5 **(F) (1) ON OR BEFORE MARCH 1 EACH YEAR, BEGINNING IN 2027, AN**
6 **OPERATOR SHALL REPORT TO THE OFFICE:**

7 **(I) INFORMATION ON THE PROTOCOLS REQUIRED UNDER**
8 **SUBSECTIONS (B) AND (C) OF THIS SECTION;**

9 **(II) THE NUMBER OF TIMES THE OPERATOR HAS ISSUED A**
10 **NOTIFICATION UNDER SUBSECTION (B)(2) OF THIS SECTION; AND**

11 **(III) DETAILS ABOUT THE METHODS USED UNDER SUBSECTION**
12 **(B)(3) OF THIS SECTION.**

13 **(2) THE REPORT REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS**
14 **SUBSECTION MAY NOT CONTAIN ANY PERSONAL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ABOUT**
15 **A USER.**

16 **(3) ON OR BEFORE JULY 1 EACH YEAR, BEGINNING IN 2027, THE**
17 **OFFICE SHALL:**

18 **(I) COMPILE DATA FROM THE REPORTS SUBMITTED UNDER**
19 **PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION FOR THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING**
20 **CALENDAR YEAR; AND**

21 **(II) PUBLISH THE DATA ON THE OFFICE’S WEBSITE.**

22 **(G) A VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION IS:**

23 **(1) AN UNFAIR, ABUSIVE, OR DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICE WITHIN**
24 **THE MEANING OF TITLE 13 OF THIS ARTICLE; AND**

25 **(2) SUBJECT TO THE ENFORCEMENT AND PENALTY PROVISIONS**
26 **CONTAINED IN TITLE 13 OF THIS ARTICLE, EXCEPT § 13-411 OF THIS ARTICLE.**

27 **SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect**
28 **October 1, 2026.**