

**KATIE FRY HESTER**  
*Legislative District 9*  
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Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on  
Cybersecurity, Information Technology  
and Biotechnology



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**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of SB 162 - Public Schools - Cyber Safety Guide and Training Course - Development, Implementation, and Reporting**

January 19th, 2022

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 162, which is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 231 from last year. This simple bill directs the State Department of Education, the Maryland Department of Health, and the Behavioral Health Administration to develop a cyber safety guide and training course in consultation with professionals who specialize in child development and child psychology. The guide will include information and best practices promoting responsible internet use through the prevention and management of:

- Cyberbullying
- Content depicting or encouraging self-harm
- Hate speech and graphic content
- Identity theft and cybersecurity threats
- Dissemination of false information
- Negative impacts of social media and technology usage on behavioral and physical health

The handbook will then be posted to the websites of the Department of Education, Department of Health, and the Behavioral Health Administration, and distributed to each county board of education for their own use.

Over the past two years, more of our lives have been spent online than ever. While we've all taken necessary steps to slow the spread of COVID, we have depended on technology

for work, school, and to connect with one another. For those of us with children, I'm sure you've noticed just how much our children are online, now more than ever.

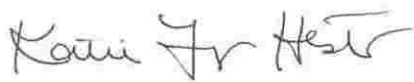
In 2019, the Joint Committee on Cybersecurity, IT, and Biotechnology received testimony from Dr. Jacob Swartz from Georgetown University Hospital, and Dr. Steven Czinn from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, who noted that 95% of teens in 2018 had access to a smartphone, 45% were online at almost all times, and over 90% used a social media platform—and this was before COVID shifted life online. Since 2010, the suicide rate among teen boys has doubled and the suicide rate among teen girls has tripled.

While correlation does not always mean causation, recent research has shown complex links between mental health and social media usage. Simple steps like minimizing screen time early in life, participating in healthy patterns of co-use on the part of the parent, and modeling healthy screen use can make all the difference - but they do require knowledge of best practices and a concerted effort on all our parts to come together and address this complex public health issue.

You will see in the fiscal note of the legislation that while MSDE estimates that general fund expenditures may increase if contractual services are necessary, the Department of Legislative Services notes that free modules and services are available to meet the requirements of the bill at reduced cost. DLS also notes that development and distribution of the cyber safety guidebook can be achieved with existing resources. You will also see a letter of information from MSDE in the bill file that is generally supportive, but that has two main questions; my office is working with MSDE right now on technical amendments to resolve those questions, and I hope to have their full support soon.

I think it's time we make decisive action on this important issue. I believe this work is important to our constituents, and will be of great use to parents, teachers, and students attempting to balance the demands of an increasingly digital world with their own mental and behavioral well-being. For that reason **I respectfully request a favorable report on SB162.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester  
Howard and Carroll Counties