

McComas Testimony Maryland Age-Appropriate Design Act (HB901)
Hearing March 1st, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby, and committee members. My name is Christine McComas and I appreciate you hearing me today.

My husband David and I are lifelong Marylanders and raised our four children in Howard County, including Grace McComas.

Maryland's Anti-Cyberbullying criminal statute, Grace's Law, bears her name.

Grace is the third of our four girls. Her sisters are all now strong, independent, and successful adults, two with doctorates and one just graduated from N.C. State and headed into the Peace Corp....

But our beloved Grace Katherine is forever 15, having died by suicide after an uninvestigated drug-assisted sexual assault at 14, followed by malicious, dehumanizing and hate filled cyber abuse over social media.

Grace was a funny, wonderfully kind, and well-loved human being.

She had big blue eyes, a bubbly laugh, and was the was the most joy-filled person I have ever known. She made us laugh Every. Single. Day.

She never had a smart phone and wasn't even on Twitter, but didn't need to, to hear about and later see the things being said.

"Tweets" Aimed at a Child

"i hate hate hate hate hate hate hate you. Next time my name rolls off your tongue, choke on it.. and DIE."

"i hope you somehow see this and cry yourself to sleep then kill yourself....might as well your just a worthless piece of shit."

"No one f*ing likes you. It's just sad and I kind of feel bad for you."**

"snitches need to have their fingers cut off one by one while they watch their families burn"

“kind of reminds me of when one of my followers printed out a tweet of mine, like who the f*** goes that far #peopleshouddie”

“snitches...i will kill you”

“well damn i just got out of trouble... How stupid it is that one person can f***k so much up #cun**”

We tried desperately for months to get help before it was too late, including mental health support for her, as we shared the screenshots of the abuse with multiple public agencies and literally begged for assistance to make it stop.

She was a communicative teen who knew we were struggling to get help... and that help never came. We lost her Easter Sunday of 2012.

As we stood over our young teen daughter’s brain-dead body at Johns Hopkins, we were devastated and outraged at the injustice of it all. We knew we had to start speaking out, telling Grace’s story, to warn other parents about the hidden dangers of the internet.

Using Grace’s Memorial page on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/GraceMcComasMemorial>) for advocacy, Grace’s Law passed unanimously in 2013. Again in 2018 and 2019 I returned to Annapolis for the unanimous passage of Grace’s Law 2.0, which updated the original law to cover the ever-changing landscape of digital dangers, including sextortion, suicide baiting and more.

Over the past decade I’ve come to know families with tragic stories from around the world, and regularly get heartbreaking messages from other Maryland parents, right here at home, urgently needing assistance to protect their own children.

At this time, *even the best parents are unable* to keep their kids safe online. It has become clear that Big Tech isn’t interested in regulating themselves and their products are not designed with kids’ safety in mind.

Instead, they have *monetized* our children online. Secret until recently, algorithms are push-feeding dangerous and psychologically damaging content TOWARDS our kids, and platforms are designed to keep them online for longer, driving up profits with little care for the collateral damage.

But that damage has names and faces, dreams lost, and beautiful young lives never lived.

Next month it will be an unbelievable 11 years since I last hugged my outgoing and kind “blueberry eyed” girl.... And yet the dangers and the deaths continue.

Last fall I visited Capitol Hill with multiple moms who have also lost their beloved children to various digital harms, to try and get common sense federal regulations passed. Big Tech with their Big Pockets are powerful and vigorous opponents, falsely fearmongering about constitutionality.

Other countries and states have passed these protections. Maryland families deserve the same.

The Maryland Age-Appropriate Design Code Act requires tech companies to design their products with the safety of children at the forefront. It includes protecting children’s on-line privacy, limiting data collection, turning off geolocation and making privacy features ON by default so parents don’t have to go searching for them.

This legislation is desperately needed, and I am heartened that with its passage, MD will AGAIN be a leader in the fight to protect children online.

We have no time to wait. Maryland families need and deserve these protections NOW.

Thank you.

Christine McComas

Remember G.R.A.C.E. by Giving Respect And Compassion to Everyone





Our 'blueberry-eyed' girl



May 2, 2013

Gov. Martin O'Malley signs 'Grace's Law'
to protect future children from cyberbullying



2019 Grace's Law 2.0
signed by Maryland Gov. Hogan

Maryland's Grace's Law 2.0

