

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 901
Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Children’s Data**

**House Economic Matters Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 901, which would require a business that offers an online product likely to be accessed by children to complete a certain data protection impact assessment, prohibit a business from offering a certain online product before completing a data protection impact assessment, require businesses to document certain risks associated with certain online products, require certain privacy protections for certain online products, and prohibit certain data collection and sharing practices.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

Educators know that students’ learning is impacted by their experiences outside the classroom. Social media is increasingly a part of those experiences: ninety-five percent of teenagers in the U.S. have access to a smartphone, and a majority of teenagers say that it would be difficult to stop using social media.¹ Though online platforms have benefits – including for teaching and engaging students in the classroom – young people are simultaneously suffering the effects of unregulated social media practices and content, including invasive data collection, targeted advertising content, misinformation, and harassment.² In 2021, 16% of high school

¹ Teens, Social Media, and Technology. Pew Research Center (2022).

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>

² NEA’s letter to social media companies. National Education Association (2021).



students reported that they had been bullied through social media, and considerable research suggests that the contents of adolescents' social media feeds impact their self-esteem and mental health.^{3 4}

In 2022, California took initiative to protect children's privacy and wellbeing by enacting legislation to require an age-appropriate design code. California state law, which was modeled after social media guardrails in the United Kingdom, now requires companies to review their products' impact on children and enact practices that prioritize children's interests.

All children deserve to learn and thrive in a safe environment, including online. Especially as an increasing number of students report mental health challenges, Maryland should lead by example and become the next state to enact common-sense regulations for social media and other online platforms used by children.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 901.

<https://www.nea.org/about-nea/leaders/president/from-our-president/neas-letter-social-media-companies>

³ Youth Risk Behavior Survey: 2011-2021. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023).

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

⁴ How can we minimize Instagram's harmful effects? American Psychological Association (2021).

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/03/feature-minimize-instagram-effects>