



Testimony Concerning HB 901
“Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Children’s Data”
Submitted to the House Economic Matters Committee
March 1, 2023

Position: Favorable

Maryland Family Network (MFN) supports HB 901, which would require online products likely to be accessed by children to incorporate certain safeguards and privacy protections. Young children can be particularly vulnerable to exploitation in an online environment, and this bill will take some important steps to ensure their security.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and early childhood education, as well as other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that children, along with their parents, have access to high-quality, affordable programs and educational opportunities.

Engaging online can pose particular risks for children, whether that entails content seen by children, contact with others, online behavior, or possible commercial exploitation. Technology companies and the platforms they operate cannot, regrettably, be relied upon to prioritize children’s safety over profits. In many ways, the opposite can prove true, with potentially dangerous outcomes in the children’s behavior or their exposure to predators and harmful material.

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises families to develop a media-use plan and minimize screen use for very young children. Still, we know screens are ubiquitous. Parents use applications to entertain, engage, and educate young children. Applications and websites designed to attract young children may have complicated terms of service or tracking and data collection tools working behind the scenes.

Following the lead of the United Kingdom and California, this legislation would institute a number of important safeguards to protect children whenever they are online.

MFN urges a favorable report on HB 901.