

TESTIMONY ON HB0634

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Lamia Ayaz, and I am a junior at Howard High School in Ellicott City, Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here with you today in strong support of HB 634, sponsored by Delegate Vogel.

I am 16 years old. And I, alongside my peers, have grown up surrounded by social media. Every single day, starting from the ages of 4 or 5, we are bombarded with images and videos of people's bodies. The vast majority of this content has heavy filtering: jawlines are enhanced, skin is smoothed, faces are made slimmer, certain features are made larger and others smaller. It has become the standard, to the point where a 2021 study found that 90 percent of young women today filter their photos.

But it would be ludicrous to suggest that this issue is limited solely to young women. Popular influencers, both male and female, filter and edit their bodies as well. Some with millions of followers promote appetite-suppressant candies and diet pills. We have created a culture where body image issues are cultivated for profit.

Being exposed to this content once or twice may not be significant. But when you are exposed to this content every single day, for multiple hours a day, we find ourselves confronted with a much larger issue. We compare ourselves to the content we consume, and we begin to find fault with every part of our body. Unattainable and unrealistic images become our standards. For this reason, social media has undoubtedly contributed to the rise of body image issues.

It's true that people often will choose short-term benefit over long-term safety, and this is especially true for teenagers. And when we see something cunningly marketed as a fix-all solution, an easy way to lose large amounts of weight when nothing else has worked, to fix the features we have been taught to hate, it shouldn't be surprising that it can be difficult for vulnerable adolescents to say no.

Providing minors easy access to something as unregulated and untested as diet pills is unacceptable. I implore you to vote yes to HB 634. Thank you for your time.