

**Testimony of Dalia Hashad, ParentsTogether Action
March 1st, 2023**

Good afternoon Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee. Thank you for having me today. I appreciate this opportunity.

My name is Dalia Hashad. I'm here on behalf of ParentsTogether, a US organization made up of parents, including parents across Maryland, in support of House Bill 901.

Parents need help.

We are overwhelmed, overburdened, and outmatched by Big Tech companies whose products - by deliberate design- have taken over kids' lives from school to socialization.

Every other industry that puts a product in front of our kids - whether it is a car seat or a football - must design those products so that they are reasonably safe.

When it comes to the social media platforms that virtually all of our children are on every single day, there is almost no meaningful regulation protecting our children.

In just one example of how these companies are hurting our children, researchers found that within 2.6 minutes, TikTok recommended suicide content to the teen accounts. Within 8 minutes, TikTok served content related to eating disorders. And every 39 seconds, TikTok recommended videos about body image and mental health.

This is out of control.

This lack of regulation is hurting our kids. It's changing who our kids are and forever altering who they can become - b/c of social media, children suffer from unprecedented rates of depression, anxiety, cyberbullying, eating disorders. We can't get dangerous challenges like the choking game taken off of platforms, and believe me, we have tried. The platforms give drug dealers and sexual predators unprecedented access directly into our kids' bedrooms.

Parents are angry and we want action.

A recent ParentsTogether survey found that 95% of parents said that social media companies should have stronger regulations, and over 250 Maryland parents have signed a letter supporting HB 901.

For parents, the Age Appropriate Design Code is a prayer answered. This is regulation that we want, it's what we need and it's protection that children deserve.



Chair C.T. Wilson

Economic Matters Committee
6 Bladen Street, Room 231
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Wilson and Committee Members,

We are parents, grandparents, and other Maryland residents who care about kids, and we're writing because Maryland needs the Age Appropriate Design Code Act. (House Bill 901 and Senate Bill 844, Delegates Jared Solomon and C.T. Wilson and Senators Chris West and Benjamin Kramer.)

Families are in crisis. We're fighting every day to protect our kids from depression, cyberbullying, eating disorders, dangerous viral "challenges," exposure to drug use and to sexual predators – all of which are fueled by social media for big tech profits. These dangers have life-threatening consequences for children. Teens who spend five or more hours a day on social media are 71% more likely to have one or more risk factors for suicide than those who spend less than an hour a day. That's a terrifying number when you consider that 81% of 14 to 22 year-olds said they use social media either "daily" or "almost constantly."

This constant use is by design. Social media companies engineer their products to keep kids online as much as possible – through algorithms, notifications, and endless scrolling – because it makes them money. These manipulative tactics harm users, especially the youngest and most vulnerable. Regulating

the tech products our children use is way overdue. We have nutrition labels on food packaging, rigorous testing for cribs and car seats, and yet the technology most children use daily has few to no safeguards.

More than 80% of Americans say they want laws that force social media platforms to take steps to make kids safer online. We agree with President Biden, who in his State of the Union address said that “we must hold social media platforms accountable for the experiment they’re conducting on our children for profit.” But families can’t wait for Congress to act. Maryland has the opportunity to lead the nation in protecting children online and prioritizing young people’s mental, physical, and emotional health over profits for private companies. The best way to do that is design codes.

Design codes are proven to work to protect children. The UK implemented the Age Appropriate Design Code in September 2021. Since then, tech companies have made changes to products that children use to ensure their data isn’t needlessly collected and that product design is not detrimental to their health and well-being.

We believe Maryland children deserve these protections too, and we need your help getting them for our kids.

We call on Maryland lawmakers to put children’s interests ahead of those of the tech industry by supporting the Age Appropriate Design Code Act.

Sincerely,

Pulin Modi
Kensington, MD

Phyllis Gaiti
Oxford, MD

Tamir Orbach
North Potomac, MD

Sharon Brown
Baltimore, MD

Laurine Cooke
Silver Spring, MD

Kelley Pendergast
Pasadena, MD

Charles MacFarland
Adamstown, MD

Kathleen Bentley
Baltimore, MD

Kari Smith
Temple Hills, MD

Val Brown
Loch Raven, MD

Arelene Uzmed
White Hall, MD

Tracey Katsouros
Waldorf, MD

Stacey Davis
Abingdon, MD

Kesra Hoffman
Middletown, MD

Adedokun Ojo-Ade
Gaithersburg, MD

Alan Willis
Columbia, MD

Jonathan Marten

Linda Murphy

Frederick, MD

David Bergstein
Rockville, MD

Yasi Moez
Rockville, MD

Laura Carter
Princess Ann, MD

D. Greelaw
Temple Hills, MD

Kerry Moose
Silver Spring, MD

Loidy Jones
Upper Marlboro, MD

Michael Briese
Silver Spring, MD

Tom Glenn
Columbia, MD

Countess Gregory
District Heights, MD

Selena Gomez
Derrwood, MD

Susan Linfen
Westminster, MD

Sirina Sucklal
Savage, MD

Terrence Pires
Parkville, MD

Nancy Moreno
Silver Spring, MD

Kathleen Zeminsky
Ellicott City, MD

David Burtnick
Reston, MD

Edward Scott
Frederick, MD

Meredith Mohr

Hyattsville, MD

Isidor Patapis
Rockville, MD

Jessie Young
Finksburg, MD

Ricardo Sandoval
Frederick, MD

James Beeler II
Boonsboro, MD

Virginia Laurenzano
Gambrills, MD

Holly DiGiovanni
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Carla Bennett
Cockeysville, MD

Kim Turner
Perryville, MD

Douglas Sedon
Jefferson, MD

Sidi Bojang
Silver Spring, MD

Pau Eisenberg
Baltimore, MD

Susan Dickerson
Clinton, MD

Marcela Zegada
Potomac, MD

Jina Hall
Baltimore, MD

Elizabeth Newton
Dundalk, MD

William Snyder
Forest Hill, MD

Rick Stack
Silver Spring, MD

Kristen Bowman

Elkton, MD

Mary Carol Durange
Charlestown, MD

Kalliopie Lewellyn-Moon
Essex, MD

Kim Hock
Forest Hill, MD

Ryan Clifford
Ellicott City, MD

Lisa Boynton
Annapolis, MD

Natalie Chernet
Brookeville, MD

Jane Randall
Chestertown, MD

Rachel Kelton
Laurel, MD

Laine Malcotti
Columbia, MD

Peggy Cermak
Woodbine, MD

Jill Hack
Woodbine, MD

Carolyn Waters
Westminster, MD

Mary Arendt
Brooklyn Park, MD

Donna Mellin
Mt. Airy, MD

Joanne Mead
Woodbine, MD

Bonnie Bricker
Elkridge, MD

Robin Kittleman
West Friendship, MD

Erin Devlin

Columbia, MD

Tracy Steven
Baltimore, MD

Angela Haupt
Frederick, MD

Gene Manon
Hagerstown, MD

Lynda Indyke
Cockeysville, MD

Nathan Baker
Hagerstown, MD

Barbara Winner
Arnold, MD

Jerry Cohen
Columbia, MD

Christine McComas
Woodbine, MD

Nancy Shafer
Ocean City, MD

Lindsay Michael
Woodbine, MD

Melora Parish
New Market, MD

Spencer White
Columbia, MD

Julia McCready
Columbia, MD

Brandi Khalaf
New Market, MD

Ray Feldmann
Annapolis, MD

Beverly McNemar
Mt. Airy, MD

Vicky Cutroneo
Woodbine, MD

Laura Newberger

Woodbine, MD

Columbia, MD

Valerie Weidemann
Columbia, MD

Teresa Macek
Laurel, MD

Parry Aftab
Lebanon, MD

Laurie Carson
Catonsville, MD

Alicia Buxton
Woodbine, MD

Deborah Davis
Columbia, MD

Christie Schumaker
Cooksville, MD

Dana Garrett
Ellicott City, MD

Benjamin Schmitt
Ellicott City, MD

Ellen Mackey
Ellicott City, MD

Krissy Kelley
Mount Airy, MD

Christine Dustin
Woodbine, MD

Linda Brown
Woodbine, MD

Shawn Costello
West Friendship, MD

Jon Traunfeld
Ellicott City, MD

Lisa Markowitz
Ellicott City, MD

Wendy Himmel
Woodstock, MD

Kimberley Meissner
Woodstock, MD

Jackie Taylor
Ellicott City, MD

Heather McComas
Williamsport, MD

Brianna Stanley
Ellicott City, MD

Cissy Lynch
Woodbine, MD

Barbara Krupiarz
Ellicott City, MD

Beverly Edwards
Perry Hall, MD

Heidi Berry
Mt. Airy, MD

Joelle Lazaris
Ellicott City, MD

Nicole Rathmann
Mount Airy, MD

Cristen Reid
Frederick, MD

Carlina Doody
Mount Airy, MD

Laura Strong
Mt. Airy, MD

Christine Sourherm
Woodbine, MD

Elizabeth Crook
Mt. Airy, MD

Sue Askeland
Mt. Airy, MD

Chris Burleigh
Ellicott City, MD

Andrea Stremmel

Vivian Dorwart

Ellicott City, MD

Tim Kvech
Woodbine, MD

Dana Sauro
Mt. Airy, MD

Erica Weiss
Kensington, MD

Paulina Puig
Kensington, MD

Marianne Roberts
Huntingtown, MD

Jesse Mosley
Baltimore, MD

Marilyn Thomas
District Heights, MD

Belinda Barnes
Fort Collins, MD

Jamie Walker
Baltimore, MD

Ronald Henry
Forest Hills, MD

Katherine Zywan
Baltimore, MD

Ann Bornstein
Abingdon, MD

Donald Schwartz
Baltimore, MD

John Mattingly
Leonardville, MD

Michael Coe
Baltimore, MD

Michael Taylor
Clinton, MD

Joanna Zacari
Keyser, MD

George Goldman

Westminster, MD

Lisa Scepura
West Friendship, MD

Varuni Dayaratna
Kensington, MD

Mariella Purvis
Kensington, MD

Kerri Valencia
Kensington, MD

Shannan Brightful
Frederick, MD

Ellen Kwait
Gaithersburg, MD

Patricia Sherbondy
Hagerston, MD

Joanna Kimura
Silver Springs, MD

Victor Heggins
Owings Mills, MD

Richard Kline
Towson, MD

Ana Mallari
Wheaton, MD

Michael Gable
Hyattsville, MD

Valerie Lecuona
Rockville, MD

Sharon Dennis
Baltimore, MD

Eva Charquero
Windsor Mill, MD

Stacy Blume
Gaithersburg, MD

Michael Rozcics
Silver Spring, MD

Linda Lilly

Baltimore, MD

Katherine Medina-Mason
Elkridge, MD

Marion Julier
Gaithersburg, MD

Ramsey Russell
Walkersville, MD

Shanna Armstand
Parkville, MD

Kathleen Hall
Gaithersburg, MD

Joyce Harris
Silver Spring, MD

Robert Moscato
Bel Air, MD

Beck Wright
Elkton, MD

Lauren Bloom
Edgewater, MD

Jacque Leighty
Silver Spring, MD

Therese Boucher
Bethesda, MD

Beverly Antonio
Centreville, MD

Shirley Greene
Salisbury, MD

Ricky Hopewell
Baltimore, MD

Jane Simpson
Chevy Chase, MD

Joy Adams
Pikesville, MD

Anahita Abdehou
Bethesda, MD

Michael Phillips

Towson, MD

Twila Witcher
Severn, MD

Bryan Whitford
Gaithersburg, MD

Cindy Nowe
Annapolis, MD

Glenn Fyfe
Beltsville, MD

Douglas Murray
Reisterstown, MD

Christine Powell
Gaithersburg, MD

Brenda Anna
Riverdale Park, MD

Private Cristoforo Padula
Hagerstown, MD

Barbara Schittino
Abingdon, MA

Barbara Brooks
Arnold, MD

Melissa Shaffer
Westminster, MD

Frank Wilsey
Baltimore, MD

Laylaa Lewis
Brooklyn, MD

Stephen Rubin
Baltimore, MD

Mary Morris
Laurel, MD

Charlotte Carson
Shrewsbury, MD

Richard Shannahan
Lutherville-Timonium, MD

Erin Reid

Columbia, MD

Sharon Wall
Parkville, MD

Brian Bogdanski
Reisterstown, MD

Carol Krajewski
Walkersville, MD

Trevor Combs
Frederick, MD

Terry Scoggins
Forest Hills, MD

Brent Reitze
Bowie, MD

Linda Hutchison
Montgomery, MD

Catherine Cronk
Preston, MD

Candice Carrington
Baltimore, MD

Kenvoyna Hackett
Princess Anne, MD

Alphonso Manning
Owings Mills, MD

Dianna Milarcik
Cockeysville, MD

Donald Nelson
Randallstown, MD

Columbia, MD

Sharon Wittman
Whaleyville, MD

Mary Schneider
Clear Spring, MD

Alina Chester
Hagerstown, MD

Harriet Guttenberg
Rockville, MD

Michael Hooker
Annapolis, MD

Linda Wilkerson
Baltimore, MD

Anna Ramis
Columbia, MD

Sarah Walsh
Rockville, MD

Anastacia Monto
Easton, MD

Douglas West
Chestertown, MD

Awa Janneh
Rockville, MD

Theresa Posthuma
Frederick, MD

Sharon Rodgers
Silver Spring