

Testimony of Dalia Hashad, ParentsTogether Action
March 8th, 2023

Good afternoon Chairwoman Griffith, Vice Chairwoman Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance 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 Senate Bill 844.

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 - because of social media, children suffer from unprecedented rates of depression, anxiety, cyberbullying, and 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 Senate Bill 844.

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.