

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 844
Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Children’s Data**

**Senate Finance Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 844, which would require a business that offers an online product likely to be accessed by children to complete a data protection impact assessment, prohibit a business from offering a certain online product before completing a data protection impact assessment, require businesses to document risks associated with certain online products, require 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 students reported that they had been bullied through social media, and

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>

² <https://www.nea.org/about-nea/leaders/president/from-our-president/neas-letter-social-media-companies>



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 Senate Bill 844.

³ https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

⁴ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/03/feature-minimize-instagram-effects>