



Chairwoman Melony Griffith

Senate Finance Committee
11 Bladen Street
Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairwoman Griffith 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,

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