



**House Economic Matters Committee
February 13, 2024**

**House Bill 603
Consumer Protection - Online Products and Services - Data of Children
Maryland Kids Code
Support**

NCADD-Maryland supports House Bill 603. One of our concerns about youth and the internet is the ease of accessibility of online gaming. While there are legal prohibitions, research shows a clear and concerning amount of gambling by young people, with a growing number accessing by computer and phone.

According to the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors, between 60% to 80% of high schoolers have reported gambling for money in the past year. It is believed that up to 6% of these youth have a gambling disorder. In Maryland, the rate of gambling increased from 2017 to 2020 among Maryland residents ([2023 Maryland Youth Needs Assessment](#)). This includes more than online gaming, but focus groups of youth under 18 reported online gambling as the most common type of gambling activity.

The impact of social media, online gaming and the growing use of technology on children and adolescents is becoming more pronounced. Young people are being bullied online, are contacted by strangers online, and spend vast amounts of time checking their phones and seeking acceptance virtually. Parents who are struggling to help set appropriate controls and limits.

This bill will begin to offer some protection and peace of mind to families by requiring manufacturers and tech designers to protect children and adolescents and offer parents and caregivers the tools and designs to help them in protecting their children online. The bill will require companies to design online products with developmentally appropriate features, make high privacy settings the default, work to limit communication between adults and children they do not know, and will provide some oversight or standards regarding the development of materials for children and adolescents.

We urge this Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 603.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.