

Date: 02/09/2024

HB 0603 consumer protection- online products and services- data of children (Maryland kids code)

Committee: Economic Matters

Position: FAV

I Olivia Suite am testifying FAV for HB 0603.

As a 20-year-old young adult that grew up in the time when social media was on a high, I feel as if social media can be used as a great way to meet new people and be up to date on topics and trends. But there is the other side that is terrifying to watch happen. It can be the most dangerous thing our children and young adults are using.

This is a normalized social aspect in our everyday lives. 9/10 people you see every day have been on their social media platforms at least once that day. This is fine, but it is also upsetting. In a world where in-person communication was normalized is now changed to being through a screen. Again, this has its ups and downs as a whole. For the protection of our children through young adults we need to do better.

The number of gross things you have seen online is growing. These things are something our CHILDREN should not be introduced to until they are at least 18 years and older. Some of the things I've seen online from 16 years old to now would be:

Uncensored naked pictures of male and female body parts.

Uncensored drug use. And how to use certain drugs if you never have before.

Drinking and driving, a lot of people promote it.

Older men hitting on and grooming young children and teens.

Etc.,

I could go on and on about how social media should not be used by anyone under the age of 16. Young minds are so easy to train as to what they should be doing or should not, and when there are huge platforms training our children what to do, it is hard for a parent to step in and say that isn't okay. That's like a million people against one. It is nearly impossible.

I personally had multiple occasions where I was publicly bullied on a regular basis for years. This was due to dating people that were a different race than I was. I was called racial slurs. I was told to kill myself in group chats throughout high school. They told me how to do it and when to do it. I was manipulated into thinking no one liked me and that it was best to leave the earth to better everyone else. This was all formed by 16-18year olds who thought me dating black men was so terrible.

I was also publicly bullied for having mental health disorders, having group chats made with me in them telling me how it was fake and that if it was that bad, I would already commit suicide. Can you see how this isn't okay for any child-young adult? What if I was weaker than I was and didn't have the support from my family. I would have done it with no second thought. This is not okay for any child or any young adult to go through. This is something small, there are much larger topics and things of this nature with cyberbullying that others go through on a regular basis.

My 11-year-old cousin lived with us for a while I was 17. During that time because I had social media, she wanted to have social media. Although my parents didn't allow it, she still somehow accessed it and was able to see everything my 17-year-old self was seeing. She found that vaping was somehow cool based off social media posts and how many older teenagers were doing it and posting about it. Before we knew it, she stole vapes from people we didn't even know and took them to school and kept it in her book bag to look cool to other friends. An 11-YEAR-OLD taking and using vapes because social media showed that it is cool.

My 4-year-old nephew loves to watch his tablet during his down time. We must physically sit with him and watch what he views now because the random videos that will pop up even with a parent blocking is not okay.

We cannot hide our children from everyday life that they will encounter, but we can push that off until their brains are more equipped to handle and decide things themselves. The internet is not safe for anyone anymore.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,

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