



Committee: House Economic Matters

Bill Number: House Bill 603 – Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Data of Children (Maryland Kids Code)

Hearing Date: February 13, 2024

Position: Support

The Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA) – a professional organization of over 900 counselors who work with students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade in public, private, charter, and magnet school settings. School counselors recognize the impact interactive digital technology, including social media has on student learning, wellbeing, and safety. ***House Bill 603 – Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Data of Children (Maryland Kids Code)*** seeks to improve young people’s digital experiences by requiring tech companies to implement privacy-by-default and safety-by-design protections for kids online. School counselors have a responsibility to promote healthy student development and to protect students from digital technology’s potential risks, and therefore **SUPPORT** House Bill 603.

Online harm has real-world consequences that we as school counselors see daily, as we provide mental health support and guidance to students. Youth often feel overwhelmed and scared online, and don’t know where they can turn for timely help. High levels of depression and anxiety are stoked by constant use of online platforms including social media. This spills into the classroom and affects academic learning and performance.

The harms that occur are not due to irresponsibility but are rather a result of intentional digital design features and use of personal data by tech companies. The data collected by tech companies shapes the interactions children have online and is used to monetize

children's attention. Common practices nudge children into riskier behavior, expose them to predators, recommend harmful material, and encourage compulsive behavior.

HB 603 will protect our youth by making online platforms responsible for designing their products with kids' privacy, safety, and wellness in mind with requirements for privacy-by-default and safety-by-design protections for kids online. This means not collecting or selling their data, setting high privacy standards by default and avoiding manipulative design.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at [jcollins@policypartners.net](mailto:collins@policypartners.net).