



MARYLAND KIDS CODE

February 9, 2024

The Honorable C. T. Wilson
House Economic Matters Committee
6 Bladen Street, Room 231
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Wilson,

The undersigned are writing in support of the Maryland Kids Code (HB 603 (Delegates Solomon and Wilson)).

The Maryland Kids Code, an Age Appropriate Design Code model bill, creates a better online world for kids by requiring tech companies institute common-sense consumer protections and data privacy reforms that ensure digital products, just like physical ones, are designed safely and in an age appropriate manner.

Big Tech exploits consumers by extracting copious amounts of data from its users and selling it or using it to inform products and marketing. Simply put, more data means more profit - incentivizing companies to utilize addictive design features and other measures to keep children glued to their products. Time and again, advocates and whistleblowers have shown that Big Tech prioritizes profit over the well-being of the most vulnerable consumers in the market: children.

As representatives of organizations that work for safe, just, and thriving futures for our communities, we see how the online world is both essential and comes with severe costs, particularly to children and teens. Ensuring the safety of tech products is long overdue. That is why we support the Maryland Kids Code.

We have nutrition labels on food packaging, rigorous testing for cribs and car seats, and yet the technology children use daily from the youngest of ages have little to no safeguards. As a result:

- 75% of social media platforms [use AI to recommend children's profiles to strangers](#).
- Of the top 100 free apps for kids in Google Play [1 in 3 have banner ads](#), including ads for adult content.
- 60% of school-based apps [share kids' data with third parties](#).
- A leaked internal survey found that "[1 in 3 teenage girls is exacerbating body image problems](#)" on Instagram and that 6% of US teens link their interest in suicide directly to the platform.

This is by design. Just look at the revelations from the [recently unsealed](#) Vermont Attorney

General's lawsuit against Meta which revealed that Meta used the latest in brain science to ensure their products are stickier and riskier for our kids instead of using that knowledge to design safer products. These problems are not limited to just Meta, or just social media. The business model for the entire industry rests on an extractive business model that to date is unchecked.

The Maryland Kids Code would instead require companies to provide children high privacy settings by default and to mitigate reasonably foreseeable harms to kids from the use of their products. And unlike other approaches to keeping kids safe online, the Maryland Kids Code doesn't put the onus on parents to police every app, and it doesn't require companies to moderate content or prevent children and teens from searching for content they want to see.

Don't let tech companies claim it's impossible - we know a different world is possible. The Maryland Kids Code has already been proven to work. Similar standards were adopted into law in the UK two years ago. Since then, companies have made hundreds of specific changes to make children's and teens' online experiences safer and better—Maryland youth deserve the same protections.

HB 603 (Delegates Solomon and Wilson) is an unprecedented opportunity for our state to demand essential privacy and consumer safety protections to support youth mental health and well-being. Representing every corner of society—advocates, educators, healthcare practitioners, technologists, and young people ourselves—our coalition collectively asks for you to put children's interests ahead of the tech industry's by supporting the Maryland Kids Code..

Sincerely,

Maryland Kids Code Coalition



The Tech Oversight Project.

