



**HB 603- Consumer Protection - Online Products and Services - Data of Children
(Maryland Kids Code)**

Committee: Economic Matters

Date: February 7, 2024

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. Using their personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide emotional support, resource connection and systems navigation as well as support groups and educational trainings and workshops.

Many of the families that our staff support are families with children. Last year we served 4,603 Families and nearly 70% were families with children. MCF supports this bill for several reasons.

- We are in a digital age where children are using the internet daily at home and in their place of education. Most consumer products manufactured for children are designed for the child's safety and include recommended ages. Online products that children access daily should come with the same safety protections in place.
- We have supported families whose child was stalked and contacted by an adult through different online platforms such as roadblocks, snap chat, and Instagram. This includes two families whose young teenagers were groomed and eventually trafficked. Both children now suffer from severe mental health issues. Leading to residential treatment care for one of those children.
- Problem gambling has been another concern on our radar for families we serve. Caregivers have called seeking support for their family because their child has started to display aggression and mental health issues related to the use of gaming apps that are geared toward children. Some of



these apps require the child's cell phone number to encourage the child to use the app more and or remain on the app. Another family who became aware of their child's substance use had learned their child was purchasing substances from an individual who contacted the child through snap chat.

- Algorithms cycle and suggest friends, groups, videos, and apps. Which may not be age appropriate for a child's undeveloped brain. Online products children use can collect personal information on the child. As well as tracking them. This information can also be used by adults to make further contact with a child through these platforms. With data protections in place and an age-appropriate design code the child's privacy, mental and physical well-being are being humanely respected and protected.

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