

February 13, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SB 571 (Sens. Kramer, Hester, and West) - Favorable

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members,

As a parent of a transgender teenager and Frederick County resident who is concerned about the negative impacts the Tech Industry is having on our kids, I am writing to share my support for the Maryland Kids Code (SB 571 (Sens. Kramer, Hester, and West)).

When my daughter came out as transgender we were living in Texas and resources to support her during her transition and a community of queer people her own age were difficult, if not impossible, to find. She had a lot of questions about her body, gender, and the things she was feeling that she didn't quite understand. We were able to find resources online to answer her questions but I assumed she would also go on social media to find other teens going through a similar experience.

Initially I was shocked when she told me she didn't want to go on social media at all. I assumed that was exactly the place someone her age would go to find community. But eventually she told me that other queer and trans teens in her support group had been targeted and harassed on social media platforms and one had completed suicide due to the relentless hate and bigotry they experienced. **My daughter and her friends understood, even before I did, that social media platforms are currently a supremely unsafe space for kids who hold marginalized identities.**

Now I know that not only are teens who identify as LGBTQ+ more likely to be cyberbullied, they're also more likely to receive "friend" or "follow" requests from adult strangers than their straight peers. Much of the data harvesting that happens online is to develop data profiles to sell ads, and LGBTQ+ youth experience disproportionate harm from this profiling. For instance, queer kids are more likely to see self-harm content on social media than kids who identify as straight.

It shouldn't be this way. LGBTQ+ kids deserve to be able to use social media without being targeted for data collection and subject to algorithms that push content they never asked to see. It's my responsibility as a parent to fight for an equal world for my child and that means her online life too.

That's why I'm respectfully asking you to vote 'aye' in support of HB 603, the Maryland Kids Code. The bill includes stronger default privacy settings and better data protections that foster an online environment where it's safer for all kids, no matter their identity, to grow, explore, and express themselves.

We are proud to live in Maryland now, a state that is committed to protecting and supporting queer and trans youth. Please support SB 571 and help make Maryland a leader, once again, in the fight to make the world safer for kids like my daughter.

Sincerely,

Cary Cuiccio
Frederick, Maryland