

Hello. I'd like to thank Chair Beidle and the Members of the Senate Finance Committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you all today.

My name is Arielle Geismar, I'm with Design It For Us, and I'm terrified. I'm terrified because the improper design and implementation of technology is ruining our lives. The companies that adopt malicious design practices aren't just addicting young people - they're fundamentally changing our brain chemistry. It's time we look at choices made by big tech to deliberately turn our psyche to a profit and implement responsible, common-sense regulation. I come here today in support of SB 571.

When I talk about irresponsible design, I'm talking about intentional choices made in creating a digital platform to ensure a young user spends more time, attention, and brain capacity on a device, like constant notifications and an endless scroll. This kind of content is breaking and shaking us. Young people end up more isolated than ever, with scientifically proven higher rates of anxiety, depression, drug usage, and eating disorders.

But it's not just about what you see on the device. It's about what you don't see. Our data - kids data - is being ruthlessly harvested and sold - all in the name of profit. Children's sensitive data - like their likes and dislikes, dreams, and fears - are being pinned against us. The mental health of young people HAS to be a priority for you. It's a priority for me when I lost one of my close friends, Frankie, to suicide in 2019.

As a little girl, I was reading content on Instagram encouraging me to starve myself and the more I tried to make sense of what I was reading, the more the algorithm showed me disordered eating encouragement content. And this would have been different if this was a mistake in the product. But this was the design. In the recently unsealed Vermont Attorney General lawsuit, we all learned Meta knew about this. And they acted irresponsibly and did nothing. This law would help prevent that.

I've been active as a youth activist since I was sixteen in New York City. I have engaged in social justice issues my whole life. And I can tell you that *so many* communities - young people, my Queer community - just as examples - are feeling the harmful effects of social media. And we're looking to you for action.

Technology regulation must be a bi-partisan issue. If you saw what we see every day, you would act immediately. These apps - like it or not - are where our young people play. If there was an unsafe playground that was riddled with unwanted sexual advances, higher rates of drug usage, and a hotbed for anxiety and depression, I'd like to think you would act *immediately*. I know I would.

So, I stand before you to say - that playground exists. And it's on all of our phones. It's on your kids' phones. And before you think "my kid would never be exposed to that" - oh yes they would. Because we don't have a choice what we're exposed to online. And we don't have a choice what big tech does with our highly sensitive data. But you do. You have a choice.

Senators: vote yes on SB 571.