

**Committee:** Senate Finance Committee

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 571 – Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Data of Children (Maryland Kids Code)

**Hearing Date:** February 14, 2024

**Position:** Support

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am here today in support for HB 603, which addresses the critical issue of protecting our youth online. As an Assistant Professor at Bowie State University, Past President of the Maryland School Counselor Association, and a former School Counselor with over 15 years of experience in Prince George’s County and Montgomery County, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact of social media on students’ social-emotional well-being.

In addition to my professional experience, I am also a parent of teenage and preteen sons who attend school in Anne Arundel County. This unique perspective allows me to speak not only as an educator but also as a concerned parent.

The increase use of online platforms has granted students unprecedented access to content and interactions, often leading to detrimental effects on their self-image and overall mental health. As a result, these issues frequently spill over into the classroom, placing additional strain on school counselors who must address conflicts and crises that start online at home.

In addition, the impact of social media is not confined to middle and high schools, school counselors are reporting elementary school students are increasingly exposed to age-inappropriate content and engage with platforms designed for older children. As recent reports have shared this has contributed to rising levels of anxiety, feelings of isolation, and exposure to harmful material among our youngest learners.

HB 603 presents an important opportunity to safeguard our youth by holding online platforms accountable for prioritizing children's privacy, safety, and wellness. By implementing measures such as privacy-by-default and safety-by-design protections, this legislation aims to prevent the collection and sale of children's data, establish high privacy standards, and mitigate manipulative design practices.

I urge you to support HB 603 and help ensure a safer and healthier online environment for Maryland's youth.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nikki Ham  
Assistant Professor

Bowie State University

240-997-5943

[nham@mscaonline.org](mailto:nham@mscaonline.org)

[nham@bowiestate.edu](mailto:nham@bowiestate.edu)

Prince George's County