



Testimony of Kirsten D'Souza
Coalitions Director
Chamber of Progress
Re: MD SB 571

February 14, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Beidle and members of the Committee:

My name is Kirsten D'Souza and I serve as the Coalitions Director for the Chamber of Progress, a tech industry coalition committed to ensuring all Americans benefit from technological leaps. Our corporate partners include companies like Amazon and Google but our partners do not have a vote on or veto over our positions.

We urge your committee to oppose SB 571 which will impose fundamental changes to how critical online services work, rendering many of them unusable for vulnerable populations in Maryland.

One of Chamber of Progress's top priorities is ensuring children have access to safe and inclusive online spaces. Unfortunately, many regulations and policies modeled after Age-Appropriate Design Code with the intention of protecting children may end up doing more harm than good by exacerbating the vulnerabilities of marginalized young people.

For minors, social media connections can provide a lifeline.

In the CDC's latest [Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey](#), more than half (55%) of young people experienced emotional abuse in the home and more than 10% reported experiencing physical abuse in the home. A majority of adolescents [report](#) that social media helps them feel more accepted (58%).

The support social media offers from peers to mitigate stress can be especially important for youth who are often marginalized, including racial, ethnic, and sexual and gender minorities. For example, minors within the [LGBTQ+ community](#) use social media to find friends, seek emotional support, and search for information about their identities and health - especially those growing up in unsupportive families or communities.

There may be unintended consequences concerning the definition of "harm" to minors,



including over-moderation.

We are concerned about SB 571 lacking a clear specific definition of “harm” to minors.

This provision will cause social media platforms to avoid litigation by over moderating. This disproportionately impacts young people of color, as [social media has provided a platform for teens and students of color](#) to speak up against racial prejudice, with 82% of Black and Hispanic users stating that social media is effective for creating sustained social movements and preserving historically-marginalized groups’ access to protected speech.

Fearful that the Attorney General may deem certain content “harmful” to some or all minors, or find a company’s newly required child-centric data protection assessments inadequate, online services will be pressured to identify remote or unlikely harms—and to self-censor accordingly. The AADC will thus discourage websites from hosting and promoting content—for users under the age of 18 and for adults, due to age-assurance challenges—including critical resources that underprivileged children rely on to deal with familial and personal crises.

We agree with the need to build in greater protections for young users, but some of this bill’s requirements would end up harming vulnerable users. Accordingly, we request you **oppose SB 571.**

Thank you,

Kirsten D’Souza
Coalitions Director