

Good afternoon Chair and members,

It is an honor to speak with this committee today in support of the Maryland Kids Code. My name is Siobhan Hayes, I am the Tech Lab Director at Digital Harbor Foundation. Digital Harbor Foundation is a nonprofit organization focused on disrupting the root causes of the digital divide in our communities. Our work focuses on promoting digital inclusion through developing innovative, equity-based STEM learning experiences for youth, educators, organizations, and communities.

At Digital Harbor Foundation we focus on preparing youth to use technology wisely and teaching their peers how to use it wisely. We continue to do this by:

1. We facilitate equity-based STEM learning experiences for youth and educators, to empower youth to transition from being *consumers* of technology to *creators* of technology.
2. We provide youth and families with affordable broadband, and empower youth and family members to be “Digital Navigators” and promote digital skills in their communities.
3. We support a portfolio of “Tech-for-Good” startups that serve as a model to youth and industry that technology companies can be designed to elevate society.

While at Digital Harbor we are working on the youth side of the equation, we fully agree that technology companies must be held accountable for their design decisions. Technology companies whose business is based on interactions with youth bear a responsibility in designing products that encourage and support the growth of their youngest users.

The Maryland Kids Code provides necessary guardrails to keep companies from collecting sensitive and personal data from children to and to design with their online safety at the center.

The Code appropriately recognizes that to fully participate in society and learn, children need to be online and should be able to benefit from all the internet has to offer, but we have an obligation to ensure that their online experiences are safe and their privacy is protected.

The digital divide is real. Access to digital skills and knowledge varies widely depending on many factors, including location and socioeconomic status. The proposed online

protections for children acknowledge that a child's level of online safety should not depend solely on a parent's digital skills and knowledge. It is up to all of us to ensure that Tech Companies are held accountable to design standards that support the well-being of our children.

Person centered design is not a new concept. It has been around for decades and is present in many of the digital products we use daily.

But many online platforms have avoided this approach especially when it is more lucrative to collect and sell consumer data, including data of children.

The Maryland Kids Code is simple: it requires technology companies to design products that are safe for anticipated audiences, protecting their privacy and well-being.

This is a fundamental step in continuing to create safe places for children to learn and grow, and absolutely necessary in fostering the next generation that Digital Harbor Foundation envisions: A generation of youth who grow up to become creative and ethical technology leaders, who build technologies and organizations that have a positive impact on the world.

Thank you for your time and we are pleased to ask that the committee recommend a favorable report on the 2024 Maryland Kids Code.

