

Maryland Association of School Health Nurses



February 13, 2024

Dear Chair Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

As President of the Maryland Association of School Health Nurses (MASHN), my mission is to help our state's children grow into healthy and thriving adults. MASHN is a professional organization dedicated to promoting the role of school nurses in the health and educational success of students. MASHN provides leadership, advocacy, and professional development to school nurses across Maryland. I am writing today representing MASHN colleagues to share our strong support for SB 571, Consumer Protection – Online Products and Services – Data of Children, known as the Maryland Kids Code. I commend Senators Kramer, Hester and West for introducing this important legislation.

Children and teens inhabit an increasingly online world, and many students spend over half of their waking hours interacting with on-line spaces. Increased digital engagement comes with significant risks and hampers student's ability to interact in a healthy way with peers and adults. As school nurses, we see firsthand in the health room the harms of digital immersion play out in our schools. Rising rates of violence in our schools, self-harm, eating disorders, overdoses and suicidality are public health crises that social medial algorithms exacerbate. In addition, we are amid a critical nursing shortage that is especially impactful in school health. When school nurses spend more and more time with struggling teens, our available resources are stretched even further.

The National Association of School Health Nurses (NASN) published [research](#) earlier this school year that highlights the epidemic nature of the psychosocial impact social media has on adolescents. Trends include higher levels of depression and anxiety, often driven by loneliness and fear of missing out, that correlate with a teen's frequency and intensity of social media use.

Equity and health for all is important to all of Maryland's over 1 million children in K-12 schools. Younger children from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to lack access to structured activities and adult supervision, leaving them more susceptible to unsupervised digital time. Racial and ethnic minority teens have higher rates of depression and loneliness and experience more bullying online, according to research by NASN.

Our children are our future and deserve the opportunity to grow into thriving and healthy adults. MASHN urges a favorable vote on SB 571, Maryland Kids Code because it would provide common-sense protections for the kids and teens we care for every day, by mandating strong safety by design and security by default features. It would put into place consumer protections like those that are in place for everyday items such as car seats and vehicles. Those are the same kinds of basic protections that Maryland's young people deserve online.

Thank you for your consideration.

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