

SHANEKA HENSON
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Ways and Means Committee

Joint Committee on
Children, Youth, and Families



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 780

**Internet-Connected Devices and Internet Service Providers – Default Filtering
of Obscene Content (Maryland Online Child Protection Act)**

Chair Pamela Beidle
Vice Chair Katherine Klausmeier
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Members of the Finance Committee

As the cross-filer of SB 780, the Maryland Online Child Protection Act, I am honored to address you today. This bill is of utmost importance to me, as it seeks to safeguard the well-being of our state's youth in an increasingly digital world.

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) conducted a study that paints a stark picture of the dangers our children face online. Their findings, drawn from a comprehensive review of over 100 research articles, surveys, and reports, highlight the detrimental effects of adolescent exposure to pornography. These effects include addiction, the objectification of women and girls, risky sexual behaviors, increased victimization, and sexually aggressive behavior. Shockingly, a recent survey revealed that over half of adolescents exposed to pornography had witnessed violent content, depicting scenes of choking, individuals in pain, or situations resembling rape.

In light of these alarming statistics, SB 780 mandates that phones, tablets, and game devices marketed to minors be defaulted to "On" safety settings. It capitalizes on existing resources to ensure that our children are protected from the harmful effects of explicit online content.

Some may argue that such government-mandated filters and privacy rules infringe upon parental rights and restrict access to information. However, it's crucial to understand that these measures are carefully balanced to empower parents while still preserving access for consenting adults. Modern filtering software minimizes the risk of overblocking educational content, and parental controls offer flexibility for adjustments. Ultimately, SB 780 prioritizes the well-being of children while respecting parental discretion.

It's essential to recognize that this legislation is not about censorship but about safeguarding vulnerable individuals from harmful content. Similar protections already exist in various contexts, such as in schools and broadcast television. SB 780 merely extends these safeguards to the digital realm, ensuring that our children can explore online spaces safely.

I implore you to support SB 780 and prioritize the safety of Maryland's youth. Together, we can make a profound impact on the lives of our children and safeguard their innocence in an increasingly complex online landscape.

Thank you for your attention to this vital matter, and I trust that you will give careful consideration to the merits of SB 780.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SH' with a large flourish underneath.

Hon. Delegate Shaneka Henson

District 30A- Anne Arundel County