

February 13, 2024

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger  
House Judiciary Committee  
House Office Building, Room 121  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 0555 Unauthorized Dissemination of Personal Identifying Information - Prohibition

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Yousuf Siddiqui, a junior at Mt. Hebron High School in Ellicott City, and an avid user of social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. I stand before you today, both as a student and a digital native, to express my strong support for HB 0555 and to share my concerns over the increasing threat of doxxing, especially as it pertains to the use and misuse of these platforms by my peers and myself.

Social media, for many of us, is a double-edged sword. Platforms like Instagram allow us to connect, share, and express ourselves in creative ways. However, they also serve as fertile ground for doxxing, where personal information can be disseminated widely and rapidly. On Snapchat, the situation is even more precarious. The platform's design, which encourages the sharing of moments through photos and videos that supposedly "disappear," can foster a false sense of security. Yet, screenshots can immortalize these moments, making them a tool for doxxing when shared without consent.

Consider the case that became a national conversation: the doxxing of a high school student due to a misunderstood post on Instagram, leading to widespread harassment and threats. The student's personal information was shared across multiple platforms, demonstrating the ease with which a life can be disrupted through the misuse of social media. Another example involves Snapchat, where a seemingly private photo was screenshotted and circulated, resulting in the student facing bullying and academic repercussions.

These incidents underscore the vulnerability of students in the digital age. Our lives, so often documented on these platforms, can become open books for those with malicious intent. The repercussions extend beyond the digital realm, affecting our mental health, academic performance, and personal safety. I see this worry echoed in my friend's groupchats.

HB 0555 is a crucial step forward in addressing these challenges. By prohibiting the unauthorized dissemination of personal identifying information, this bill acknowledges the evolving landscape of threats faced by students and seeks to provide a measure of protection that is desperately needed. It recognizes that platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, while offering opportunities for connection, also require safeguards to prevent abuse.

The passage of HB 0555 would send a powerful message to students across Maryland—that their safety and privacy are valued and protected. It would offer a semblance of security in a world where digital footprints are indelible and where the line between public and private is increasingly blurred.

I urge you, as members of the House Judiciary Committee, to support HB 0555. In doing so, you are not just legislating against the act of doxxing; you are standing up for the rights of young Marylanders to navigate the digital world without fear. You are ensuring that platforms like Instagram and Snapchat remain tools for expression, not weapons of harm.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for taking action to protect the digital well-being of students like myself.

Sincerely,

Yousuf Siddiqui  
Student, Mt. Hebron High School  
Ellicott City, MD