

February 16, 2024

Attn: Maryland General Assembly Judiciary Committee

RE: HB 1062 (Delegate Lopez) Criminal Law - Harassment - Digitally Altered or Generated Visual Representations – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Clippinger and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to express Bumble's support for House Bill 1062. By passing this bill, Maryland will establish a much-needed deterrent against a pervasive form of digital harassment and send a strong signal that it's not enough for us all to simply acknowledge this bad behavior in public forums, but we must move to design principles and regulation that discourages and prevents this kind of behavior in the future. We know as well as anyone how many positive use cases there are for A.I. We have been employing A.I. for many years to help make our products safer, and to make the experience of using our apps more enjoyable and efficient for our communities, and we will continue to do so into the future. But these new developments can't, and shouldn't, come without guardrails or ethical considerations.

Allow me to state upfront that I am not asking you to solve a challenge for Bumble's sake. Our founder, Whitney Wolfe Herd, having been the target of online harassment herself, created Bumble to provide a safe space for people to create healthy and equitable relationships. This mission is built into our product: we've rolled out safety features within the Bumble app itself, like Private Detector, an A.I. tool that helps shield our community from unwanted lewd images.

We have taken our expertise on this area of online harms and work across the globe to prohibit it. We worked with legislators to pass anti-non-consensual intimate image bills successfully in Texas, Virginia, and California. We have successfully passed a similar amendment to the UK Online Safety Bill into law and campaigned to add offenses penalizing cyberflashing and non-consensual intimate image abuse, including AI-altered nudes, across all 27 EU countries in the recently completed EU Gender Directive. Our team has presented on the voracity of this issue at the UN annual convening and we continue to explore options to prohibit deepfake A.I.-generated intimate images in other jurisdictions.

I am asking you to pass this bill on behalf of the many many women affected, who are the overwhelming victims of this type of digital harassment. They have disproportionately borne the brunt of it: between 90% and 95% of all online deepfake videos are nonconsensual intimate images, the research company Sensity AI estimates — and around 90% of those feature women. The psychology behind the creation of explicit, nonconsensual deepfake imagery is a fundamental lack of respect for women, and a means to sexualize and humiliate them. Famous cases, like the recent Taylor Swift incident, often generate headlines, but every day, women — especially women of color and other minorities — are victimized like this in communities across the world.

Our customers report that these feelings aren't temporary. A startling number of customers we surveyed said that it makes them distrustful of others online and more vulnerable when using the internet. Think about that: at a time when the COVID-19 crisis has revealed our utter dependence on technology, an act for which there is no legal prohibition nor consequence is having a profoundly disempowering effect on women. We are committed to helping make the A.I. and synthetic media spaces safer, and through our collective efforts and calling for stricter regulation and safety measures, we believe that we can contribute to a safer and more equitable internet. House Bill 1092 is a major step forward in this effort. Thank you, Delegate Lopez, for sponsoring this important bill.

Sincerely,



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