

Hearing: March 7th, 2025

Good afternoon esteemed members of the Maryland General Assembly,

My name is Mickie Chandra. Today I offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 897 based on my own experience and as an advocate for the Free State PTA.

I want to share both good news and bad news. Let's hear the bad news first.

Like many parents and caregivers in my community, I have witnessed and experienced the ugly underbelly of peer to peer social media. The risks are far greater than most of us know, and my sense is that we are not wired to automatically look for threats and take precaution when proceeding to use something that appears friendly on the surface. Social media can connect us with loved ones and provide access to creative and entertaining content. But because of the proliferation of our children's personal data across the internet and lack of advanced privacy safeguards within social media apps, our children are exposed to a highly predatory environment. It is in that environment where the most terrible cases of exploitation begin. Our children, while at school and in engaging with social media content created by those in our school communities, expose themselves unknowingly when they engage on social media platforms that do not have the necessary privacy protocols.

Until the proper guardrails are built, I ask that leaders support this bill for the creation of guidance for our primary and secondary students to more safely navigate social media. I ask that our educational institutions "think twice" before engaging with students on social media platforms. Further, in the process of creating this guidance, it is important to carefully inspect the incentives around use of social media by K-12 schools and the Ed Tech providers that serve these institutions.

Now for the good news.

We've all heard the proverbial saying that there are two sides to every story. That's true of social media. Most headlines are dominated by stories of the mental health crises, addiction, and exploitation of our children. However, social media is also an amazing connector. It is not going away, and rather, its capabilities are becoming more robust. How can we use social media to foster better connections with our loved ones, or connect with safe communities who share similar interests? Or even better, how can we use social media to access content that serves, supports, and inspires us as individuals? That is where the silver lining, and the good news, can be found. This has been my experience as well. Content that is short and sweet yet speaks "a thousand words" can go a long way to turn a bad school day around.

In conclusion, please support Senate Bill 897. Thank you for considering my testimony during deliberations of this bill.

Sincerely,  
Mickie Chandra  
Advocacy Committee

Free State Parent-Teacher Association