
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HOUSE BILL 21

Social Media Platforms - Vloggers and Video Content Featuring Minors (Child Influencers Protection Act)

Economic Matters
February 4, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports HB0021, which will mandate a vlogger to deposit financial compensation into a trust fund for a minor the vlogger has featured in a monetized video content, posted on social media platform(s). This is an overdue step forward in protecting the safety of minors in a digital space.

The explosion of social media in recent times has revolutionized income generation, creating diverse and accessible revenue streams. “Sharenting” (sharing intimate family moments publicly online) has become increasingly common as social media platforms like YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram, and Facebook provide financial compensation to monetized accounts.¹ A parent or guardian with a smartphone can take a picture or video of their child and have it online for viewing almost instantaneously. In some online spaces this has evolved into “family vlogging”: regularly sharing recorded information about a person's family specifically to engage viewers and, in many cases, earn revenue. Some of these accounts are operated by families and guardians who feature their minor children in the creation of video content for mass consumption and thus compensation.

Since compensation amounts are designed to increase with an increase in the amount of content and viewership, some of these families can earn significant amounts of financial compensation for their posted content – without the consent of or benefit to the child. In many instances, especially when the minor becomes the main attraction of views, they also then become the focus of the content. Some children are in the public eye almost from the moment of their birth, and remain so constantly afterward. The children involved in these videos simply by virtue of their age are unable to give informed consent and often unable to have a say in how they are represented. Even when a child is old enough to become cognizant of the risks of a digital footprint and begin advocating for themselves, that child is still ultimately dependent on the adults in their family. As Dr. Robyn Koslowitz puts it, “how does a child refuse consent to the very person they rely on for survival?”²

HB 21 creates protection for minors who are involved in digital content creation and revenue generation by mandating that a percentage of the earnings they help to generate be set aside in trust, accessible to the minor once they become an adult. This is similar to the California Child Actor's Bill, which was originally passed in 1939 as a response to a situation in which child actor Jackie Coogan found that all of his earnings were gone before he had a chance to make use of them. That money legally belonged to his parents, who had spent it. The bill has since been updated several times, most notably in 2024, when Governor Gavin Newsom signed into effect a revision that edited the bill to include child

¹ Reilly, M. (2023, January 18). Family Vlogging: Blurring the Line Between Parent and Employer. The Science Survey. <https://thesciencesurvey.com/editorial/2023/01/18/family-vlogging-blurring-the-line-between-parent-and-employer/>

² Koslowitz, R. (2025, February 11). The Slippery Slope of Sharenting | Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/targeted-parenting/202502/the-slippery-slope-of-sharenting>

social media influencers and content creators.³ Crucially, it included child influencers that are featured

in monetized content but not under contractual obligation, meaning that children who are being posted online by their parents or guardians but under no 'formal' work agreement are still afforded protections. Unfortunately, Maryland has so such provisions to protect to minors from being exploited in this way, and **minors featured in these money-making contents are sometimes compelled to endless hours of filming social media content to maximize capital for their parents or guardians. This is usually at no legally required financial compensation of their own, as was the case with The Squad.**⁴

Child influencers are not only at risk of financial exploitation: they are also at risk of abuse. The horror stories of child actors such as McCaulay Culkin and Jennette McCurdy often include adults that are domineering, emotionally controlling, manipulative and even sexually abusive. Moreover, children are unable to fully comprehend the long-term implications of vlogging. Thus, they are unable to provide informed consent for their lives to be filmed and brandished on global social media platforms for millions around the world to watch and judge critical aspects of their emotional, physical and social development. Personal medical, academic and emotional milestones or struggles can be made public knowledge, repackaged as a funny post or a teachable moment without the child's consent. **Capturing kids at their most embarrassing and vulnerable moments exposes them to emotional harm, reputational damage and a loss of control over their personal stories.**⁵ **These digital footprints of their lives continue to exist on global platforms for continuous viewing, even after they have become adults and may want to revoke their existence.**

The 8 Passengers YouTube Channel (now deleted) is a recent example. Created by Ruby Franke, at the height of its popularity it boasted over two million subscribers, making it lucrative enough to become Franke's full time job and require the formation of an LLC.⁶ She documented in detail her life and interactions with her six children, including disciplinary interactions, essentially amassing the evidence that would later result in her 2024 conviction on six counts of felony child abuse.⁷

Not all cases are as shocking as 8 Passengers, this is true. However, even when a parent or guardian has only the best of intentions toward their child, sharing so much information about them publicly can cause them harm. Leaving that information vulnerable invites bad actors to take and use it for their own purposes. All that is needed to 'doxx' a person (discover and reveal all of their private information, such as address, phone numbers, and other sensitive data) is a single data point, and family vloggers routinely provide far more than that. **HB 21 seeks to give child influencers more power over their digital footprint by allowing them to request deletion of content when they reach the age of majority.**

³ California, S. of. (2024, September 26). Governor Newsom joins Demi Lovato to sign legislation to protect the financial security of child influencers. Governor of California. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/09/26/governor-newsom-joins-demi-lovato-to-sign-legislation-to-protect-the-financial-security-of-child-influencers/>

⁴ Lentz, K. (2025, April 9). *The dark side of kidfluencing true story: What was really going on behind the scenes of Tiffany Smith's content creation empire? People.* <https://people.com/the-dark-side-of-kidfluencing-true-story-11711886>

⁵ Ivey Communications. (2025, July 21). *Ivey studies kidfluencing: Harmless fun or child labour?* Western News. <https://news.westernu.ca/2025/07/ivey-research-kidfluencing/>

⁶ Graves, L. (2023, September 14). "8 Passengers" mom Ruby Franke received more than \$80K in PPP loans during pandemic, recor. <https://cbsaustin.com/news/nation-world/8-passengers-mom-ruby-franke-received-more-than-80k-in-ppp-loans-during-pandemic-propublica-loan-tracking-site-paycheck-protection-program-youtuber-influencer-child-abuse-charges>

⁷ Wendling, Mike. (2024, February 20). Ruby Franke: Parenting advice YouTuber given maximum sentence for child abuse. (2024, February 21). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68353302>



For more information, please contact
Nathaniel Kirk or Demia Wiysahnyuy
umswasc@gmail.com

Concerns have been raised about the practicality of this mandate. Can any hosting platform truly guarantee the media has been deleted when hundreds of saved copies could be floating around in online spaces over which they have no authority? Certainly, copies of the Franke 8 Passengers videos are out there, but they are no longer accessible on YouTube and, crucially, they are not being

recommended by the algorithm to new viewers and not generating any new revenue for Ruby Franke. Deletion of the media from its host platform, even if complete deletion from the internet cannot be guaranteed, is still a massive step forward and seems to be a reasonable thing to expect a company to be able to do.

HB0021 was introduced previously in some form in both 2024 and 2025, with neither making it past a first hearing. Prior testimony was robust and well-articulated, suggesting that this is an issue which many people have a vested interest in and which has perhaps been lost in the shuffle of the political landscape of the last few years. We urge the House to give HB0021 a look with fresh eyes and consider moving it forward, as several other states have done.⁸

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB0021. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁸ Miller, K. (2025, June 25). Protecting Young Influencers: New Laws Protect Content Creators That Are Minors | MultiState. <https://www.multistate.us/insider/2025/6/25/protecting-young-influencers-new-laws-protect-content-creators-that-are-minors>