

TAXPAYERS PROTECTION ALLIANCE

March 6, 2026

Maryland House of Delegates
Economic Matters Committee
6 Bladen Street, House Office Building, Room 230
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the millions of taxpayers and consumers we represent, the Taxpayers Protection Alliance (TPA) writes to express its concerns with House Bill 1179, a bill relating to app stores and age verification. Despite its noble desire to protect children in the digital age, HB1179 would in fact do the opposite. This misguided legislation would endanger the privacy and data security of children and families across the state.

HB1179's fundamental flaw is its requirement that users of app stores—the gatekeepers of the digital world—submit to age verification. Age verification requires users to submit a significant amount of sensitive personal information, which then becomes stored in large databases, liable to be hacked or to fall victim to data breaches. This information usually takes the form of scans of government-issued identification documents or biometric data, such as facial scans. Given regular cybersecurity lapses, this mass collection of sensitive data would directly undermine the goal of ensuring children's safety in the digital world.

Children already face vast privacy dangers spurred by cybercrime. As noted by the R Street Institute last year, "The problem is so extensive that research by Experian suggests that 25 percent of children will be victims of identity fraud or theft by the time they are 18."¹ Moreover, R Street continues, "More than half of minors who were victims of identity theft report being denied access to credit at least once because of it, and some deal with the consequences for a decade or more. Some have even acquired a lifelong criminal record for an offense committed by the thief that stole their identity." Requiring children to provide sensitive personal information to access everyday digital tools—which are becoming ever more ubiquitous—would only compound these dangers.

Unfortunately, the privacy dangers of HB1179 do not end there. Parents would be further required to give consent before their children are allowed to download apps. Parental oversight of, and control over, their children's online lives is unquestionably best. However, the process outlined in the bill would compound risks to data security and privacy. Under HB1179, a parent would have to prove his or her relationship to the child, which would inevitably require even more intrusive data gathering to prove both the identity of the parent and his or her status as the child's legal guardian.

Recent experience demonstrates the dangers of exposing large amounts of sensitive information in vulnerable databases—even those purported to be secure. In the digital age, hacks and data leaks are commonplace. Indeed, a Duke University analysis found that more than four in five of companies say they have dealt with a hack.² Tech companies—including some of the largest and best protected companies—routinely fall victim.³

Even third-party age verifiers, which specialize in the business of age verification, experience cyber incidents. "[T]hese services have suffered cyber events, too," as TPA noted in its recent amicus brief filed at the Supreme Court in *NetChoice v. Fitch*. "Outabox, which provided facial-recognition services to various in-person

¹ <https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/child-identity-theft-is-a-huge-problem-the-solutions-are-simple/>

² <https://cfosurvey.fuqua.duke.edu/press-release/more-than-80-percent-of-firms-say-they-have-been-hacked/>

³ <https://www.csoonline.com/article/534628/the-biggest-data-breaches-of-the-21st-century.html>

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businesses, announced a massive cybersecurity breach in 2024 resulting in the piracy of more than one million consumer records. AU10TIX, an identity-verification service used by recognizable platforms like Uber, TikTok, X, and LinkedIn, is another victim of cybercrime.”⁴

Even ostensibly privacy-protective age-verification mandates, such as those recently enacted in France, have exposed consumers to digital dangers.⁵ Supreme Court Justice Alito put it best during the oral arguments in *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton*: “There have been hacks of everything.”⁶

Users widely understand the cybersecurity and privacy risks that accompany age verification mandates. In the United Kingdom, which recently enacted a broad age verification mandate in its Online Safety Act (OSA), vast numbers of users flooded app stores to download virtual private networks (VPNs) to avoid the mandate. In just the first few days after the OSA’s provisions went into effect, VPN use skyrocketed. Proton VPN reported a 1,400-percent surge in new user registrations.⁷ NordVPN reported a “1,000 percent increase in purchases,” and many other VPNs reported increased user demand.⁸

Protecting children in the digital world, like protecting children in the physical world, is of the utmost importance. However, particularly when considering regulatory proposals to regulate novel digital technologies, it is critical to understand the unintended second- and third-order consequences that would flow from such proposals becoming law. Increasing experience has shown that age verification cuts directly against the goal of protecting children by exposing their personal information—and that of their families—to cybercriminals. TPA urges the Committee to double-down on a commitment to digital privacy—the only effective basis of personal privacy in a digital age—by rejecting age verification mandates or any other proposals that undermine safety.

Sincerely,



David Williams
President

⁴ <https://www.protectingtaxpayers.org/press/watchdog-group-files-amicus-brief-defending-mississippian-social-media-users/>

⁵ https://aiforensics.org/uploads/AIF_report_AgeGO_porn_platforms.pdf

⁶ https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/argument_transcripts/2024/23-1122_7m58.pdf

⁷ <https://x.com/ProtonVPN/status/1948773319148245334>

⁸ <https://www.wired.com/story/vpn-use-spike-age-verification-laws-uk/>