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## Written Testimony of Sabina Hughes, Policy Fellow

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### Testimony in Favor of MD H.B. 0952, Consumer Protection - Companion Chatbots - Regulation

Maryland General Assembly, Economic Matters Committee

March 3, 2026

Members of the Committee,

My name is Sabina Hughes, and I am a Public Policy Fellow with the National Center on Sexual Exploitation. I am pleased to share NCOSE's conditional support for provisions of HB 0952.

AI chatbots have become deeply embedded in young people's lives. In fact, 3 out of 4 teens reported using them in 2025. While this technology can offer certain benefits, it has also been linked to devastating and life-altering harms. There have been documented instances of AI chatbots encouraging children to engage in self-harm, promoting risky sexual behavior, and even pushing children to commit suicide.<sup>1</sup> These risks require immediate legislative action.

H.B. 0952 largely addresses the multitude of harms caused by chatbots, which have been deployed by tech companies with little to no oversight or accountability.<sup>2</sup> NCOSE supports the sentiment of H.B. 0952; however, we would like to provide several recommendations to strengthen the child protection aspect of it.

This bill includes several long-overdue safeguards, such as requiring AI companions to disclose to users that they are interacting with a non-human system and establishing penalties for non-compliance and risky conduct. These provisions move us towards meaningful and actionable legislation.

After review by NCOSE's legal counsel, **we urge the legislature to clarify the bill's text in these three areas to strengthen the bill:**

1. **That AI chatbots are products.** This distinction would allow harmed individuals to pursue civil remedies under the established product liability principles. Without it, companies will continue to evade accountability for foreseeable harms caused by their AI systems.
2. **To limit data collection on minors.** The provider would have to collect data from chats in order to know whether it needs to report a conversation to a mental health provider.
3. **Strengthen parental control for AI chatbots.**

**This bill rightly holds developers accountable for developing dangerous AI companions. However, we ask that you please strengthen the bill by clarifying that AI Chatbots are products.** Maryland now has an opportunity to lead by ensuring that tech companies prioritize safety, accountability, and transparency over profit.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

<sup>1</sup> N/A. (2025). "CSM AI Risk Assessment: Social AI Companions". Common Sense Media.

[https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/pug/csm-ai-risk-assessment-social-ai-companions\\_final.pdf](https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/pug/csm-ai-risk-assessment-social-ai-companions_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> N/A. (n.d.). "People-First Chatbot Bill". Epic. [https://epic.org/people-first-chatbot-bill/#:~:text=The%20People%20First%20Chatbot%20Bill%20is%20a%20model,can%20provide%20qualified%20medical%20or%20legal%20advice\\*\\*](https://epic.org/people-first-chatbot-bill/#:~:text=The%20People%20First%20Chatbot%20Bill%20is%20a%20model,can%20provide%20qualified%20medical%20or%20legal%20advice**)