



**Testimony of Kendall Schrohe,  
Design It For Us**

Maryland Senate Finance Committee

March 12, 2026

**Design It For Us writes in strong support of S.B. 827.** My name is Kendall Schrohe, and I am testifying on behalf of Design It For Us, a youth-led coalition of over 482 members across 41 states, including right here in Maryland, fighting to hold Big Tech accountable and protect young people online. We were founded on the belief that young people must be at the center of the policy and decision-making process to reform our technology ecosystems.

**How I Got Here**

I am 23 years old and part of the first generation to have grown up fully online. I got my first iPhone in middle school, and then Instagram, Snapchat – all of it – came early in high school. Even with strict parents who forced me to keep my phone downstairs, I would wait until they were asleep, sneak down, and stay up half the night scrolling. Social media felt like a drug. I wanted the validation and sense of connection it seemed to offer, but to have that, I had to suffer through body image issues, a fear of missing out, and an inability to be present in my own life. My parents truly tried hard to protect me, but restricting technology use without design-level safety just made me want to use these platforms even more.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, which was the start of my freshman year of college. Whatever fragile balance young people had tried to have with technology collapsed overnight. For almost two years, the only life we were allowed to have was online. There was no campus, no friends in person, no world outside our screens. We were handed over entirely to these platforms at exactly the moment we were most isolated and vulnerable, and the companies that built them knew exactly how to keep us online even after the real world began to reopen. By the time we came back to campus as sophomores in 2021, something had broken. The isolation had changed us in ways we were only beginning to understand. Within three months, three students at my university died by suicide. Everywhere you looked on campus, students' heads were down, on their phones. There was no sense of community. We were hooked.

Later that year, ChatGPT launched publicly. All of a sudden, a whole new animal was let out of its cage – not only were our attention and social lives being exploited, but now our critical thinking skills, our relationship with knowledge, and our sense of what is real were being

destroyed, too. Immediately, I began to watch my classmates outsource their thinking (emotional and intellectual) to chatbots, without a single guardrail in place. I knew then that this was going to be the defining problem of our time – the greatest threat to human connection and cognition that our generation would face. And I knew I wanted to dedicate my career to solving it.

### **Design It For Us Fights Back**

That is how I found Design It For Us, a coalition of young people who refused to let our generation continue to be Big Tech's test subjects, and who were asking the same question I was: why, in a country with consumer protection laws and product liability standards, are companies allowed to release technologies this powerful with no rules and no consequences? What drew me to Design It For Us specifically is our belief that the online ecosystem can and should be a force for good – for creativity, community, and growth – and that as digital natives, our voices should shape the decisions that help to make it that way. At Design It For Us, we advocate for policies that ensure tech companies design their systems for us and with us in mind — policies that hold Big Tech responsible for safety rather than placing that burden on users and families, that address the underlying business models that incentivize harm, and that give young people real agency over their digital lives. Since our founding, we have helped pass the Maryland Kids Code and Age-Appropriate Design Codes in Vermont and California. We have also been a voice for meaningful change at the federal level, including advancing kids' online safety and privacy bills.

Unfortunately, sitting here four years after the public launch of ChatGPT, I can tell you it has only gotten worse. What started as something I watched infiltrate my college campus quickly spread like a wildfire through the rest of the world, making everyone, especially young people, test subjects of an unregulated technology that wasn't designed with us in mind, again. I am here today representing Design It For Us because chatbots have introduced a whole new level of harm that we are not equipped to address without legislation like S.B. 827.

As the Campaigns Lead at Design It For Us, I frequently talk to young people across the world about their relationships with chatbots. As a 23-year-old, I constantly hear about my peers' use cases for chatbots. The stories I hear are both personal and alarming. My peers describe ChatGPT as their boyfriend or best friend, and they ask it for dating advice or for guidance on how to respond to a text. Coalition members report that their peers go to chatbots before they go to their parents, friends, or therapists. Young people are turning to these AI systems for mental health support, relationship advice, help processing grief, and questions about their identity – the most private and vulnerable moments of their inner lives. And the companies behind these products have designed them to keep people coming back. Nearly six in ten (57%) teens use chatbots to search for information, 54% say they use chatbots to “help with homework,” and 47% say they use chatbots for “fun or entertainment.”<sup>1</sup> There are young people out there dying

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2026/02/24/what-parents-say-about-their-teens-ai-use/>

by suicide following chatbot interactions<sup>2</sup> and people entering what clinicians are now documenting as AI psychosis. In this phenomenon, prolonged chatbot use genuinely distorts a person's grip on reality. These systems are sycophantic by design, built to validate and agree with users rather than challenge them.<sup>3</sup> People are increasingly living inside a feedback loop that tells them only what they want to hear and quietly cuts them off from genuine human connection or any sort of human friction. We do not talk to each other the way we used to; instead, we talk to chatbots. And unlike social media, which at least nominally connected us to other people, chatbots offer the illusion of connection with none of its substance.

Underneath all of this is a data crisis that has caused harm for decades but is about to get much worse. Big Tech is harvesting the most intimate disclosures people have ever made. They know about people's fears, mental health struggles, questions about identity, sexuality, and belonging, and they are using that information to build more manipulative models and, increasingly, to target people with ads.<sup>4</sup> OpenAI and Meta have already announced plans to integrate chatbot conversations into their advertising pipelines, which means these companies will intentionally show a teenager who tells a chatbot she is struggling with her body image ads for a fad diet or acne medicine. This manipulation-for-profit loop also played out on social media. Still, without rules or incentives for tech companies to design chatbots safely, these harms will continue to grow.

### **Why S.B. 827 Is the Solution**

S.B. 827 does not ban chatbots or restrict young people's access to technology; instead, it forces companies to build these products safely and holds them accountable when they don't. All of the harms I've seen firsthand – the emotional dependency, the data exploitation, the blurred line between machine and human – this bill addresses.

When a young person pours their heart out to a chatbot about their mental health struggles, this bill stops companies from using that sensitive information to target them with ads. When a teenager develops a dependency on a system deliberately designed to keep them coming back, this bill requires the company to assess and mitigate that harm. When a young person in crisis genuinely cannot tell whether they are talking to something that understands them or a machine that is designed to make them feel understood, this bill requires companies to make that clear – explicitly, repeatedly, and in plain language. When a company trains its next model on the most intimate things people have ever shared, without their knowledge or consent, this bill bans companies from using minors' information at all. It requires them to get real affirmative consent from adults before using their personal information. And when all of this causes real and documented harm, this bill gives people the legal right to hold companies accountable.

---

<sup>2</sup><https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/09/19/nx-s1-5545749/ai-chatbots-safety-openai-meta-characterai-teens-suicide>

<sup>3</sup> <https://med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2025/08/ai-chatbots-kids-teens-artificial-intelligence.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://openai.com/index/our-approach-to-advertising-and-expanding-access/>

## **Maryland Must Continue to Lead**

Maryland has already been a leader in the technology accountability space, having passed the Maryland Kids Code and the Maryland Online Data Privacy Act. Passing S.B. 827 extends that legacy into the chatbot era and allows Maryland to remain a leader in consumer protection. The young people most vulnerable to these harms are younger than me, and they have no one at tables like this speaking for them. We cannot afford to wait for this industry to decide on its own to do better.

Design It For Us urges the committee to issue a favorable report on S.B. 827. We have already lived through what happens when we don't act in time. We are asking you not to let it happen again.