

Esteemed Delegates of the Judiciary Committee,

I hope my message finds you well. I must confess that this is my first communication to any legislator on any matter. I beg your forgiveness for any breach of decorum I may commit.

I am a lifelong Marylander, currently residing in Ellicott City. I watched with great interest the Judiciary Committee meeting on March 4, 2026, with my main focus on the discussion around HB693: Civil Actions - Distribution of Obscene Material to Minors. I was quite disheartened to find not a single person came to argue against a favorable report. At the risk of seeming the villain, I find it is my moral obligation to do just that.

At the outset, it is important to me to clarify that I am no fan of the pornography industry. It is highly exploitative, both of performers and of consumers, and you will find me no friend to it. I was appalled to hear the testimony of several of the speakers in regard to the effect upon them of early exposure to these materials, particularly the young woman whose first exposure came at the quite-too-young age of seven. But as has been written, if one is truly invested in defending freedom, one often finds himself, regrettably, on the side of scoundrels.

I was born in the mid-eighties, making me what the demographers call an Elder Millennial. I remember life before the widespread adoption of the Internet, and also a life growing alongside the early Internet. Though the early days of Web 1.0 are firmly behind us, I pine for them. It was a truly unique time, where one could meet and talk to a person from any place and any walk of life, but always, *always* anonymously or pseudonymously. In those days we were told, in no uncertain terms, that to offer any shred of personally identifying information on the 'Net would result in catastrophic consequences at the hands of a stranger. We grew up fiercely protective of our privacy and our security on the Internet, and it is position I hold to this day. I am, frankly, an extremist on this point.

When I grew into a precocious teenager with an interest in computers, it was inevitable that I would discover how to access the Internet without my parents' help. My father had already taught me some basic programming by the fifth grade; there was no way I would remain reliant on adults to access the 'Net for long. I must now admit to having accessed pornography on the Internet as a minor, and I will submit at risk of arrogance that I grew into a sensible, responsible member of society, with a well-paying job in IT, a roof over my head, and a wife who would not describe me as abusive, aggressive, or deviant (I asked).

The basic fact is that children are much more clever than adults credit, and this is especially true of technology. Children are simply more adaptable than adults, a trait evolved to help them learn quickly, and they will adapt faster than you or I, and *much* faster than the law. I posit that, particularly with respect to pornography, age verification measures will work poorly or not at all. The methods to bypass this law are myriad and insurmountable, from VPNs and other such IP- and location-hiding technologies, to running local AI image generation models to produce bespoke erotic images, to simply connecting to a website running in a country outside the effective jurisdiction of the State. Many places in the world do not care what the law says in Maryland.

In truth, the main thrust of my argument has little to do with pornography. I am not a patron of any service or website that would be affected by this particular bill. Rather, I am a fierce advocate of a free and open Internet, which I believe to be crucial to our freedom and democracy. I believe that such an Internet has, as a foundational requirement, the option for privacy and anonymity of *all* users in *all* cases. As a young man I watched with great trepidation the adoption of the Patriot Act by the Federal

government, and the Snowden revelations that naturally followed. These radicalized me, and now all the computers and devices I own, and my behavior on line, are hardened against security and privacy threats. I now watch with the same trepidation the wide-scale push from governments around the world for age verification measures - and worse - for services ranging from pornography to chat applications. For me and people like me, any foray at all into de-anonymization, for reasons legitimate or otherwise, is simply unacceptable, and I foresee further invasions of privacy in the future if the trend is not stopped here. As has been written, the slippery slope is not a fallacy, it is a strategy.

With this in mind, and with the understanding that you are already busy with the grave and important work of building our democracy, I urge you, esteemed Delegates, to read a recent statement signed by just under four hundred security professionals from around the world on the topic of age verification, which I will link for your convenience:

<https://csa-scientist-open-letter.org/ageverif-Feb2026>

Of the twenty-six pages, only six are the open letter. One is a header, and the remaining fourteen are signatures, which include the signatures of thirty-nine Americans. While the main focus of this document is on age verification for social media, chat, online games, application vendors, and other such services, the technical, structural, and privacy concerns easily translate to the matter at hand. Furthermore, the signatories' assertion that age-verification measures will not work and will drive users to less-secure alternatives cannot be ignored.

Your guest Mr. Corby spoke at length about his industry's commitment to the privacy and security of users. I plainly do not believe him. Mr. Corby has an economic interest in the passage of HB693 and measures like it. Despite his assurances, the infrastructure required for age verification to be truly private and secure does not exist, and any such infrastructure built quickly and under threat of penalty is exceedingly unlikely to be so. Already we have seen leaks of private information from age-verification services, the most prominent being the leak of at least 70,000 government IDs by a partner working with chat service Discord. I have absolutely no faith that the age verification industry is currently up to the task, or will be in time for the proposed adoption of this bill into law.

The provision in this bill that requires verification services not retain user information will be ignored by said services, and as written is toothless without specified penalties. The nebulous suggestion that a person whose privacy is violated by such a service "may bring action" is wholly insufficient. Penalties should be large, specific, automatic, and the suit brought by the State. Anything else is an open invitation to the industry to ignore privacy. In many industries, being sued is just one of the costs of business. I expect that to be the case here.

I am sure that corporations and governments around the world are already developing AI-powered surveillance tools to scan all files transferred through the internet. I am particularly sure that this is happening in countries like China, which has a complete ban on pornography, a battle it intends to win. The CCP has no qualms about constructing a surveillance state to achieve its goals, for which we in the West rightly criticize it. Indeed, Mr. Corby mentioned methods of profiling individuals for the purposes of age-estimation that he promised without evidence would be respectful of users' privacy. I once again plainly do not believe him. I do not wish to be profiled for any reason, and such attempts to profile users likely run afoul of national laws like COPPA, which is meant to protect the privacy of the very children whose innocence is the target of this law. I plead with you to consider to which lengths you would go to make sure that no minor ever sees a single pornographic image. Will you be content with the low-hanging fruit of age verification, easily circumvented? Or are you willing to construct a

Chinese-style panopticon? Already states in our Union - California, Colorado, and New York - are attempting to legislate a requirement for age verification at the operating system level for every computer, cell phone, or other such device. The absurdity of this idea is truly remarkable, and the danger to privacy and security obvious. These measures, too, will be easily circumvented.

And I would be remiss not to mention that bans on “obscene material” often sweep up content that is not pornographic, but deemed by those who think very highly of their own morality to be “indecent”. This always comes at the expense of queer people, whose artistic works and everyday lives become easy targets. There are people in this world who would consider the wedding photographs of gay couples indecent, indeed obscene, merely because they feature a same-sex couple kissing. You know these people exist; I do not have to prove it to you. Some of these people are in positions of power right now. It is imperative, when creating any system, to consider the consequences should the worst person you know of get ahold of it. What would the worst person you know of do with a system that requires ID verification to access “obscene material”? Definitions in law change. What is obscene in the future may be vastly different from what is envisioned today.

Though I suspect that I have already lost the battle with respect to HB693, I plead, desperately, for it to be the end of attempts at user profiling at any level for any reason in our State. And so with the belief that I am unlikely to succeed, I ask - apparently alone - for the Committee to return an unfavorable report on HB693 and, at the very least, table the idea until a truly privacy and security respecting framework is established. I thank you for reading and considering my letter.

Respectfully,
Paul Young of Ellicott City