



HB468 - Health and Taxation - Digital Social Media Services and the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth

Position: Support
Hearing Date: Digital Social Media Services and the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth
Committee: Ways & Means

The Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a child or other loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. As experienced caregivers, we provide support, guidance, and hope to people who love or care for someone with a behavioral health challenge and advocate to improve the systems they rely on.

The impact of social media and other digital platforms on young people's mental health is undisputed. These platforms are designed to keep children engaged, connected, and tuned in. They create a venue for bullying, harassment, and intimidation and a space for predatory behavior from individuals who intend to do harm. The child or adolescent brain has not yet developed the critical thinking skills necessary to detect dangers or to appropriately contextualize what they see on social media sites, YouTube, or other digital platforms. One of the fathers supported by MCF services wrote "As a father of a 20-year-old daughter and a 17-year-old son, I've seen the impact that smart phones and social media have on kids. Many kids suffer from an addiction to the phone and an obsession with their social media presence and a need to feel constantly connected. Our kids are suffering!" A recent survey conducted by MCF of the families we support across Maryland found that 60% are concerned that social media or time spent on YouTube is negatively impacting their child's mental health.

We're experiencing increases in the number of children who require mental health interventions from community behavioral health providers. This is putting a further strain on systems that are already stretched near or beyond capacity. When families reach out for help, they encounter long waiting lists for services, a lack of services in their community, and obstacles accessing services due to transportation or financial challenges. In that same MCF survey, 46% of the parents and caregivers who responded said that costs for their child's mental health services put a financial strain on their family and 37% noted that long wait lists are impacting their children from getting the services they need. In short, social media is creating a mental health crisis among our most vulnerable members of society, our children, and forcing parents and caregivers to manage the emotional, social, and financial fallout.

MCF supports HB468 as a measure to hold social media and digital content providers accountable while creating opportunities to strengthen and expand the crucial behavioral health services children need.

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