March 23, 2022

**Testimony of Elizabeth Banker**
**VP, Legal Advocacy**
**Chamber of Progress**

**Minnesota State Senate**
**SF 3933: Social media algorithms that target children**

Good evening Chairman and Members of the Committee.

I'm the Vice President of Legal Advocacy at Chamber of Progress, an industry association that works to ensure that all Americans benefit from technological leaps. Our corporate partners include companies like Google, Meta, and Twitter, but our partners don't have a vote or veto over our positions.

One of our organization's top priorities is to promote safe and healthy online communities – and I know this committee shares that goal.  Unfortunately, while this bill is well intentioned, it would make online communities worse, not better, for kids and teens.

That's because it would ban the very tool – algorithms –  that online platforms depend on for elevating "good content" and reducing visibility of potentially dangerous content. **It is like saying we want cleaner drinking water – but then banning the water filters that remove sediment and toxins.**

Algorithms are essential for platforms to enforce their rules against content that promotes self-harm, eating disorders, and suicide. Without algorithms, all users are likely to be exposed to more of these types of content.

In addition, algorithms enable important interventions for teens who may be in trouble. Platforms use algorithms to direct users searching for information on eating disorders, illegal drugs, and suicide to third-party content that can provide help — whether crisis hotlines, support communities, or educational materials. *This would violate the bill, because it prioritizes content.*

Algorithms also enable platforms to provide safer online experiences giving parents and teens more choices and control.  For example:

- YouTube Kids is a parentally-supervised, curated experience for younger kids, which uses a combination of algorithms and manual curation to show only kid-friendly videos.

  This bill would make it impossible for YouTube Kids to use algorithms to find and deliver children's content.

- Last year Instagram rolled out new settings that give teens and parents more control over recommendations for teen users.

This bill would break these tools, which rely on algorithms to sift through posts to and weed out content parents don't want their children to see.

- And third, last October Senator Amy Klobuchar urged Instagram to take more aggressive action against posts glorifying eating disorders among teens[1].  Instagram not only bans posts encouraging eating disorders;[2] last year it also started steering teens who are searching for disordered eating topics towards helpful support resources.

  Unfortunately, Instagram's ability to remove eating disorder posts and promote helpful resources is powered by the very algorithms that this bill bans.

Let me wrap up by saying clearly: we cannot make the Internet better for kids and teens without algorithms.  And because we share your goal of protecting our kids online, we respectfully urge you to oppose this bill.

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[1] https://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/3/8/38d7ecc4-5d7e-4b85-ac1c-e8289822b73c/0F286AB487F0EB594E494685EFE48A77.10.13-letter-to-facebook-instagram-signed-2-.pdf
[2] https://help.instagram.com/252214974954612