



Testimony of Kouri Marshall
Director of of State and Local Public Policy, Central US
Chamber of Progress

Re: H.F.1503: Social media algorithms that target children prohibited.

March 1, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Stephenson and members of the Committee:

My name is Kouri Marshall and I serve as the Director of State and Local Government Relations managing the Central region, for the Chamber of Progress, a tech industry coalition committed to ensuring all Americans benefit from technological leaps. Our corporate partners include companies like Amazon, Apple, and Google, but our partners do not have a vote on or veto over our positions.

We urge your committee to oppose HF 1503, which would eliminate some of the tools social media platforms use to protect children online and limit access to the benefits social media can provide.

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The bill fails to create a safer environment for minor users with its blanket prohibition on algorithms. The bill's broad definition of "algorithm" draws in every positive use of algorithms as it relates to user-generated content, especially when concerning the content that minor users may see online. Specifically, platforms use algorithms to depromote harmful and dangerous content while using algorithms to promote positive engagement and learning. In fact, algorithms also help users find content they are interested in, and filter out content they do not want.



While HF 1503 acknowledges that algorithms are essential for filtering out harmful content and promoting age-appropriate content for minor users, it ignores their other benefits, particularly for older users looking for relevant information.

For example, Twitter uses algorithms to help prioritize content that all of its users, including teenage users, find relevant.¹ A teenager interested in racial justice or Russia's invasion of Ukraine might follow multiple accounts or like tweets on those topics. This bill's ban on algorithms would prevent her from seeing tailored news on those topics, even from verified journalists or other educational sources.

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 hotlines, support communities, or educational materials. For example, Instagram not only bans posts encouraging eating disorders; last year it also started steering teens who are searching for disordered eating topics towards helpful support resources.

Further, the bill's "constructive knowledge" standard for platforms regarding the age of potential minors on their systems compels proactive age verification. This outcome results from the bill stating that a platform is liable "if the operator of a social media platform knew or had reason to know that the individual account holder was under the age of 18."

The de facto age verification requirement would likely result in platforms extracting even more data about their users. There is disagreement about the best methods for verifying users' ages, but they could include techniques like facial recognition or other biometric scans. Even less-invasive methods, like requiring users to enter their birthdate or ID in order to enter a site, would still require widespread data collection. These techniques would have to be used for every user, not just children, resulting in increased data collection for everyone on the internet.

¹ https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2021/introducing-responsible-machine-learning-initiative
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Regardless of the method, age verification would result in more surveillance of users and more data collection in the pursuit of increased security.

Additionally, the bill's requirement that anyone under the age of 18 obtain parental consent before creating a social media account could cut off vulnerable children from important resources. HF 1503 requires social media platforms to obtain permission from legal guardians before allowing users under the age of 18 to create an account. This requirement could limit access to supportive communities and resources for groups who need it most.

A recent Pew study found that majorities of teens say social media provides them with a space for connection, creativity and support.² The study surveyed teens between the ages of 13 to 17. According to this study, when asked about the overall impact of social media on them personally, more teens said its effect has been mostly positive (32%) than say it has been mostly negative (9%). In fact, many of these respondents cited developing deeper friendships and connections as reasons why.

Social media, as a tool, is also how younger users collaborate on school projects or capture field trip memories.³ In a world where media is mainly shared online and learning how to responsibly interact with others in a digital space is a requisite for engagement in society, more teachers have begun to incorporate social media tools in their classrooms to create relevant lessons.

For marginalized teens or those looking for support, social media can be especially beneficial. LGBTQ+ youth often turn to social media for resources and connection to supportive communities they might not have at home. Teens looking for information on reproductive or sexual health services, including abortion access or rape crisis centers, can use social media to be connected with experts and community resources. **At a time when books with LGBTQ+ themes are being**

²

https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/11/16/connection-creativity-and-drama-teen-life-on-social-media-in-2022/pi_2022-11-16_teens-and-social-media_0-01

³<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/guidebook-social-media-in-classroom-vicki-davis>

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banned from school libraries and reproductive rights are under attack, this bill could cut off teens from the potentially life-saving resources social media can provide.

In sum, HF 1503 would eliminate some of the tools platforms use to keep children safe online and could cut off marginalized groups from social connections and helpful resources. We urge the committee to oppose HF 1503.

Thank you,

Kouri Marshall

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