



November 20, 2024

The Honorable Phillip Robinson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Primary and Secondary Education
Ohio House of Representatives
10th Floor, Vern Riffe Center
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215-6111

Re: Oppose HB 485

Dear Ranking Member Robinson:

On behalf of Chamber of Progress – a tech industry association supporting public policies to build a more inclusive society in which all people benefit from technological advancements – I write to respectfully urge you to **oppose HB 485**, which, under the guise of promoting internet safety, threatens to undermine the rights, well-being, and safety of Ohio's students—especially women and those from marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ youth.

While we acknowledge the public sector has a role to play in promoting internet safety education and the empowerment of educators to manage personal device use in classrooms, this bill raises significant concerns as it would restrict access to critical resources and censor vital information for students who rely on schools and the digital communities for lifesaving support.

HB 485 cuts off vital support for marginalized youth

HB 485 requires each local school district board of education to adopt an “internet safety policy” limiting access to “age-appropriate subject matter and materials,” yet fails to define what “age-appropriate” means. This ambiguity risks inconsistent interpretations and implementations, ultimately inviting censorship of online resources and spaces. In turn, this ultimately threatens to cut off marginalized youth from critical online tools and spaces.

This is especially true for LGBTQ+ youth, who often rely on the internet as a critical lifeline. Only 40% of LGBTQ+ youth report living in affirming households, while 68% reported finding online spaces to be supportive, and 64% identified role models on social media.¹ These platforms provide access to mental health support, educational materials about identity, and connections to healthcare providers, advocacy organizations, and peer support networks. Limiting this access further isolates Ohioan youth and denies them essential resources.

Researchers have identified that social media can be beneficial by offering meaningful social interactions, confirmed by a Pew survey indicating 81% of American teens say social media makes them feel more connected, while 68% say social media makes them feel that they have a support network in face of hardship.² The network benefit is most critical for marginalized youth, including but not limited to youth of color,³ LGBTQ+ youth, youth with disabilities,⁴ neurodiverse youth, and low-income youth. Common Sense Media reports that for Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ youth, “social media is a vital source of connection, news, and inspiration.”⁵

Weaponization of parental consent

HB 485 includes provisions allowing parents to restrict their child’s participation in certain instruction or access to specific materials, including reproductive health, suicide awareness and prevention, or safety and violence prevention. While parental involvement in education is valuable, these requirements could block access to critical information for students—particularly those facing challenges such as abuse at home—who rely on schools and online resources for support. Policies that unintentionally censor such essential information risk leaving students without the tools to make safe, informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Censorship of critical health information

¹ See <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>

² Zain Jafar, et. al., at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10439458/#R18>

³ Thomas, A., Jing, M., Chen, H. Y., & Crawford, E. L. (2023). Taking the good with the bad?: Social Media and Online Racial Discrimination Influences on Psychological and Academic Functioning in Black and Hispanic Youth. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 52(2), 245–257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01689-z>

⁴ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/05/learning/im-a-disabled-teenager-and-social-media-is-my-lifeline.html>

⁵ See https://www.common Sense Media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2024-double-edged-sword-hopelab-report_final-release-for-web-v2.pdf

HB 485's restrictions specifically limit students' access to vital health information, including any "instruction and information" connected to "any individual, entity, or organization that provides, promotes, counsels, or makes referrals for abortion or abortion-related services." By censoring lifesaving resources on abortion, contraception, and sexual health education, this bill risks denying students access to accurate and comprehensive health information. This approach compromises student safety and undermines their right to critical knowledge as a form of censorship.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to **oppose HB 485**. While we support the value of internet safety education and empowering educators to manage technology use, such policies must not infringe on students' access to critical resources and inclusive and supportive communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brianna January". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Brianna January
Director of State & Local Government Relations,
Northeast US