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Bloomington, MN 55431

www.SAVE.org

January 11, 2024

The Honorable Bonnie Westlin
Legislative Commission on Data Practices
658 Cedar St.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: In support of the Age-Appropriate Design Code Act (SF 2810)

Dear Chair Westlin,

Good afternoon. My name is Erich Mische, and I am the executive director at SAVE – Suicide Awareness Voices of Education.

For 34 years, SAVE has been working to prevent suicide through raising public awareness, training and educating individuals and community stakeholders, and serving as a resource for suicide loss survivors.

Suicide is a preventable public health problem, but sadly, each year suicide rates continue to rise—in Minnesota and across the nation.

We lost 835 people by suicide in 2022 here in our state. For our youth ages 10-24, suicide is the second leading cause of death.

Research consistently shows a strong link between suicide and depression. Research also shows that adolescents who spend more than three hours per day online double their risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Yet, we also know that social connections help us live longer, more robust, happier lives.

The Minnesota Age Appropriate Design Code Act (MN AADC), SF 2810, is essential. It provides a reasonable, tested, and practical framework for improving the digital spaces where young people spend more and more of their time.

The MN AADC won't shut kids out of online spaces or limit their access to information.

On the contrary, the MN AADC, will hold technology companies accountable for their products' reasonable and foreseeable outcomes. It simply mandates that their online platforms act responsibly with youth data and mitigate against specified harms and discrimination.

For SAVE, the emphasis on preventing discriminatory outcomes is significant, as we know that LGBTQ+ youth who come from families that reject or do not accept them are over eight times more likely to attempt suicide than those whose families accept them for who they are. African American,

Latino, Native American, and Asian American youth who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual attempt suicide at especially high rates.

We also know that bullying, harassment, and targeting of young people based on their age, their gender, their sexual preference, their body type, and a host of other factors is real, it is devastating, and it is preventable.

As both the research and our first-hand experience show, young people must have guard rails in place to protect their mental health, especially online, where they are often alone with no other perspective than the one presented to them there.

It is not hyperbole to the families who have lost children to suicide to say lives are at stake if we do not require companies to design their products and services in a privacy-protective manner with the safety of children in mind.

And it is not fair to say that parents should bear the burden, or the sole responsibility, to protect their children. Parents' rules and limits are no match for companies who design products to manipulate children's developing brains into craving more and more time online.

Ratings, warning labels, and moderating content may be good public relations, but it doesn't address the core issue, which is companies creating products that are targeting young people and endangering young people through their design.

The MN AADC will incentivize the responsible and ethical design of online spaces that we have already seen can be used innovatively to promote healthy online habits and relationships rather than exploiting the data of our most vulnerable youth to increase profits.

We respectfully ask the Data Practices Commission to recommend the passage of the MN AADC, SF 2810 (Maye Quade), in the 2024 Legislative Session.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erich Mische', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Erich Mische
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