

Public Hearing Testimony
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Microsoft

Speaker: Pat McCabe (presenting)
Bill Number: 7354

Testimony

Regarding Raised Bill No. 7354

An Act Concerning The Commission on Educational Technology and Virtual Instruction for Connecticut Public Schools and Internet Safety

Before the Committee on Education

Monday, March 12, 2007

Chairman Gaffey, Chairman Fleischmann, and members of the Committee, please accept the following written testimony from Microsoft in support of Raised Bill No. 7354, An Act Concerning The Commission on Educational Technology and Virtual Instruction for Connecticut Public Schools and Internet Safety.

At Microsoft, we believe that every successful corporation has a responsibility to use its resources and influence to make a positive impact on the world and its people. Microsoft's commitment and responsibilities as a global corporate citizen are grounded in our company mission and values, manifested through our business practices and operations and carried out by thousands of Microsoft employees and suppliers worldwide.

As an industry leader, Microsoft recognizes its responsibility to help make the Internet safer and computing more secure. Our goal is to help create an environment in which adults, children, businesses and organizations can enjoy the full benefits of the Internet without concerns about their safety, privacy, or security. To reach that goal, we actively look to partner with government policy makers and law enforcement officials to improve and strengthen our laws governing everyone's online experience.

It is for these reasons Microsoft supports Raised Bill No. 7354.

The purpose of Raised Bill No. 7354 is to increase online course availability to students and online professional development opportunities for teachers, to provide for instruction on safe Internet use for students in grade three, four, or five, and to appropriate funds to enable the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium to deliver online courses to public schools.

Microsoft's interest in this measure pertains to the requirement that each local or regional board of education require that any school under its jurisdiction with grade three, four, or five provide instruction on the safe use of the Internet to students in such grades.

Microsoft strongly supports mandatory internet safety education as part of the school curriculum. While voluntary efforts are commendable, no child should be left behind in this critical issue area. Safety experts identify consumer education as the most effective means of combating issues such as children disclosing too much information online, creating relationships with online predators, being exposed to inappropriate content, or downloading malware or illegitimate content.

The State of Virginia recently enacted and is implementing a mandatory Internet safety law. It adds a requirement that internet use policies developed by division superintendents include a component on Internet safety that is integrated in a division's instructional program. Additionally, Virginia supplements its curriculum law with a "KidsSafe" program under the Governor's Office of Substance Abuse Prevention; this program includes an internet safety component. The program is supported by federal grant funds from the State Incentive Grant Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Substance Abuse and Health Services Administration and the Governor's set-aside of Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act funds allocated to Virginia by the U.S. Department of Education, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Additionally, internet safety is also part of federal anti-drug efforts.

Education initiatives, combined with the enforcement of laws that focus on criminal activities – such as the anti-phishing law enacted last year in Connecticut – are the necessary steps we as a society need to take to protect our children.

Microsoft strongly believes education is more effective than legislating restrictions on children. Regulating or restricting internet access for children

may be appropriate in some cases, but it should be at the direction of parents and teachers. Moreover, restrictions start down the wrong path of creating forbidden secrets that become still more attractive to children and undermining efforts at open communication between children, parents, and guardians about their online activity.

Additionally, Microsoft believes the Connecticut General Assembly should consider strengthening Raised Bill No. 7354. Threats on the Internet are not static; in fact, they are constantly evolving. When Microsoft testified last year on the aforementioned anti-phishing bill, many had not heard of such a threat. Today, phishing attacks are much more common and recognized by users of the Internet. For this reason, Microsoft believes that an online safety curriculum should not be limited to those in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. By the time those children are in sixth, seventh, eighth or higher, new threats may become prevalent on the Internet. As such, they should receive mandatory online safety instruction throughout their education.

Microsoft is very encouraged by the steps taken in Raised Bill No. 7354 and supports its enactment, but believes strengthening it to require online safety instruction throughout a child's education is prudent.

Respectfully submitted,

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