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State of Connecticut
SENATE

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Energy & Technology Committee Public Hearing, March 9, 2021

Concepts and Language Addition to S.B. 4

An Act Concerning Data Privacy, Net Neutrality, Cyber Security and Fairness in Data Usage in the New Age of a Digital Workforce.

Chairmen Needleman and Arconti, Ranking Members Formica and Ferraro, and the distinguished members of the Energy and Technology Committee, I am Sen. Tony Hwang, and today I am asking for your consideration to add language raised in proposed SB 719 and 720 to Committee Bill SB 4 - An Act Concerning Data Privacy, Net Neutrality, Cyber Security and Fairness in Data Usage in the New Age of a Digital Workforce.

This year has caused a lot of changes for how we live and work and thus pointing a spotlight on some escalating issues that the state government has not had to deal with yet. This bill would begin to explore how to manage how information and time are going digital.

Wikipedia and Social Media Posting Misinformation (Proposed Bill SB 720)

As an open platform, Wikipedia prides itself on the community of contributors it built over time. However, what is considered Wikipedia's strength is simultaneously its main weakness, since anyone can become an editor.

Ease of perpetuating false information

The openness of the platform makes it susceptible to falsifications which even the 'collective intelligence' of a vigilant community cannot always prevent. My experience and observations speaks of an entire 'toolbox' for feeding public relations content to the platform. Methods range from content removal, rewriting and cover-ups to inserting of false information. For example, paid or political editors can slip into a community of editors by writing a lot of relevant, non-promotional content. By doing this, users can earn a higher rank within the community which can later be exploited to enter public relations or biased content. There are events (e.g. round tables, writing workshops) organized for the editors in which anyone can participate to mingle with the crowd and gain the trust of other members. Furthermore, public relations people can create so-called single-purpose accounts and use multiple IP-addresses.

Politically charged actions protected through anonymity.

The presence of political public relations is another sensitive subject within the Wikipedia community as it appears that political players and their proxies try to use the online encyclopedia to score publicity and influence an uninformed public based bias and perception. The anonymity of contributors meant that other editors could not establish the nature of the user's relationship to the political party. Once content is placed onto Wikipedia as a source of reference and readily promoted by high search engine optimization it is unfortunately taken as fact and gospel. It is a powerful political tool without the validation and journalistic standard of transparency and accountability. Another frustration are the challenges of correcting the records are difficult and unresponsive and therefore many times these efforts at correction are unsuccessful. It is a grotesque form of misinformation and social media cyberbullying.

Cybersecurity Task Force (Proposed Bill SB 719)

I ask that we incorporate a concept that will advance the safety & security of our online cyber/internet activity across 1) government/homeland security, 2) corporate/academic and 3) personal/consumer sectors, helping Connecticut residents take control of their cyberspace interactions and creating proactive leadership in this critical ecosystem.

Corporate and government cyber security breaches, personal data security and user privacy have been constant news headlines. An example of your everyday reliance on our smartphones can be compromised last year, Apple iPhone and Mac users were shocked to hear that a glitch in the device's FaceTime app allows anyone calling to use the recipient's phone to eavesdrop. The glitch allows anyone to place a FaceTime call to any number, and even without the recipient accepting the call, the caller could gain access to the recipient's microphone and even a live feed of the recipient's front-facing camera. This is yet another example of breaches of privacy, just one of the many high- and low-profile security breaches in recent years, which highlights the need for the government and private sector to coordinate and cooperate to ensure individual user privacy as well as the security of government and corporate entities.

This task force will have the responsibility to develop policies, suggestions, and resources that will address the needs of (1) National and State Homeland Security including security of utilities and infrastructure, (2) Corporate Cybersecurity to protect trade secrets and clients' data privacy, and (3) protection for individual consumer's personal data and application security. We know that the pervasiveness of cyberspace and the World Wide Web has created opportunities for criminal and possible terror tactics to operate within it. Our personal and business dependency on unruly digital and cyber technology pose a real threat to the security of our state and the safety of Connecticut residents.

Government institutions, major corporations and individuals have suffered from hacking, and I believe the creation of this task force is a necessary step towards confronting the problems we are facing now and will continue to face in the future. I envision this task force to have the vision and responsibility to consult with and advise the Governor, the Legislature, state agencies, and private companies in the state to develop and implement a more integrated approach to protecting our cyber space, in addition to creating very clear recommendations and accessible resources for individuals. It should be in everyone's interest to protect our own and each other's information, data, finances, etc. and the person who fills this position would have the expertise and the mandate to ensure we are all on the same page in this pursuit.

I look forward to having the opportunity to discuss these cutting edge matters further with the committee. There must be protections in place for people to protect themselves from the threats and acts of weaponizing the internet.

I want to thank the committee for bringing this bill forward and allowing me the opportunity to submit testimony and provide suggestions to make SB 4 a better bill.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Hwang". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tony Hwang
State Senator, 28th District