

Testimony on House Bill 5037

Senator Maroney, Representative Lemar, Senator Cicarella, Representative Rutigliano, and distinguished members of the General Law Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 5037, An Act Promoting The Safety Of Minors On Social Media Platforms.

My name is John Murphy. I teach Digital Media Strategy, Social Media Business, and Digital Ethics at the University of Connecticut.

My students will go into this industry. I want them building products aligned with human development, not exploiting it. But I am here today for a more immediate reason — protecting minors in environments they are not developmentally equipped to navigate alone.

I write and speak regularly on the societal and psychological impacts of digital media, and I've spent the last decade studying how these platforms shape attention, identity, and behavior.

Let's be clear about what this bill is — and what it is not.

This is not about banning technology.

It is not about restricting free speech.

It is not about moral panic.

It is about developmental reality.

Children and adolescents do not have fully formed executive function. The prefrontal cortex — responsible for impulse control, long-term reasoning, and emotional regulation — is still developing well into the mid-20s.

Meanwhile, social media platforms are engineered by teams of behavioral scientists, data scientists, and machine learning engineers whose explicit job is to maximize engagement.

Engagement means time.

Time means more data.

Data means profit.

These platforms are not neutral communication tools. They are predictive systems trained to learn what keeps a user scrolling — and then deliver more of it.

For adults, that is already destabilizing.

For minors, it is combustible.

We are running a mass behavioral experiment on children at scale — without guardrails.

Rates of anxiety, depression, body image disorders, sleep disruption, attention span reduction and compulsive use patterns have risen in direct correlation with smartphone-based social media adoption. This is not speculation. The data is now consistent across studies.

The bill's provisions are modest.

Parental consent for minors.

Private accounts by default.

No push notifications between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m.

That last one alone matters more than most people realize.

The most neurologically vulnerable hours for adolescents are late at night. That is when comparison spirals, social exclusion anxiety, and algorithmic amplification are most potent.

Removing push notifications during those hours is not radical. It is basic harm reduction.

And let me say something clearly:

Parents are not failing. Schools are not failing.

We have handed children a device that contains a casino, a broadcast studio, a popularity contest, a pornography distributor, and a behavioral laboratory — and we've told them to just manage it.

Parents are not equipped to counter systems designed for compulsion at scale.

Industry self-regulation has failed.

Voluntary tools have failed.

Digital literacy, which we need far more of, that alone is not enough.

This bill restores balance where none currently exists.

We regulate alcohol for minors.

We regulate tobacco for minors.

We regulate gambling for minors.

We do that because developmental vulnerability matters.

House Bill 5037 recognizes that reality.

Connecticut has the opportunity to be a leader.

Not by banning technology.

Not by turning back the clock.

But by aligning platform design with child development science.

Jurisdictions around the world are recognizing this reality and implementing structural protections for minors in algorithmic environments.

We can either wait for the next decade of damage and say we didn't know.

Or we can act now.

This bill is measured.

It is reasonable.

It is overdue.

This bill does not ask whether social media should exist.

It asks whether childhood should.

Thank you for your time — and for taking this issue seriously.