

Thank you, members of the Senate Education Committee, for inviting me to speak today. I am testifying in my capacity as chief of staff at Front Porch Forum, Vermont's statewide neighbor network. We are a mission-driven Vermont Public Benefit Corporation, and our mission is to help neighbors connect and build community. With over 230,000 active members statewide, Front Porch Forum is Vermont's biggest and most trusted neighbor-to-neighbor network. FPF's members include over 13,000 Vermont businesses and nonprofits and nearly 3,000 public officials -- among them 20 current state senators and 104 state representatives.

I am testifying because Front Porch Forum has a specific concern regarding [S.284](#) (relating to the use of electronic devices and digital and online products in schools). FPF is strongly supportive of the overall intent of the bill. However, we have concerns about the definition of "social media", as presented towards the bottom of page 5:

*(9) "Social media" means the use of web-based and mobile technologies to communicate through interactive dialogue. "Social media" includes social media platforms, blogs, picture-sharing vlogs, internet application wall postings, instant and direct messaging, music sharing, crowdsourcing, voice over IP, communications through video games, and any successor protocol to transmit information.*

This current definition could reasonably be construed to include Front Porch Forum's service. As such, if the bill were passed, schools would no longer be able to use FPF to communicate with their communities. This is a significant concern for us, as many school districts currently rely on FPF as a key strategy for keeping parents informed about school-related issues.

I had a conversation a few weeks ago with Laura Derrenderinger, the public health nurse and parent who is the driving force behind this legislation. She was very clear that she did not see FPF as "social media" from the point of view of the harms to children and teens that the bill seeks to mitigate. She strongly supported FPF seeking an amendment to the draft text to update the definition of "social media", and suggested I reach out to you to work on this.

For an alternative definition, I would point the committee towards Boyd and Ellison's seminal paper "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," which is cited 20,000+ times and is the central paper in academic scholarship of social networks. A key excerpt is as follows:

"We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site."

FPF falls well outside of this definition because it is not based around profiles or connecting via those profiles. It's more analogous to the older technology of "listservs," email lists based around particular shared interests that individuals can choose to subscribe to.

The full article is accessible at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>

Thank you for your work on this legislation. Please don't hesitate to contact me with anything else I can help with.

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