



**Testimony of Zamaan Qureshi,  
Co-Chair of Design It For Us**

Vermont Senate Committee on Economic Development,  
Housing, and General Affairs  
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Chairwoman Hinsdale and members of the Economic Development Committee. Thank you for inviting me to express my support for the Vermont Kids Code, ahead of the opposition you will hear today.

My name is Zamaan Qureshi and I am a senior at American University in Washington D.C. and from Illinois. I am the co-chair of [Design It For Us](#), a coalition of youth activists from across the country driving state and federal policy to protect kids and teens online. I co-founded the organization this March but we have already made an impact. In 2022, the then-Design It For Us campaign successfully advocated for the California AADC which passed the California State Legislature unanimously and was signed into law. This year, Design It For Us has supported the introduction of the Kids Code in Maryland, Minnesota, Vermont, Illinois, and others and we have supported a trio of federal bills in Congress dedicated to holding social media giants accountable.

The Vermont Kids Code is the first step to holding Big Tech accountable. Under the Code, companies must set all defaults to the strictest privacy settings, design products for the safest experience for kids, stop tracking kids without notice, stop using kids' data to target detrimental material to them and provide privacy tools for kids to take agency over their digital experience. These compliance measures put the onus on Big Tech, not on kids or their parents, to do what they should have done years ago, and design their products for us.

Today you will hear from industry trade groups, paid for and fully funded by Big Tech who will say that this bill is well-intentioned but presents challenges. In our experience, these trade organizations are not engaging to improve the bill or seek input for a successful passage, they are

here to stop its progress. Before you listen to their testimony, I would like to take some time to address what you will hear from them today:

Big Tech will say, “This is going to break the internet, that the bill requirements are unclear, and that they simply can’t comply.” But these are fear-mongering tactics. This kind of tech reform is currently law in the United Kingdom and the internet is not broken.

Big tech will say that the Kids Code violates parental rights because parents want to take responsibility themselves. In reality, parents and kids are begging for help supporting young people online. A Washington Post report claimed that “By the end of 2022, fewer than 10 percent of teens on Meta’s Instagram had enabled the parental supervision setting.”<sup>1</sup> And a recent poll reports that 87% of the electorate believes that it is important for the government to take action to combat the harms being caused by social media platforms. We know that parents need and want safer tech products to protect kids; this is not a replacement for parental responsibility but a digital seatbelt supporting responsible parenting in the digital age.

Big tech will say that this bill violates the First Amendment as shown in the CA AADC Lawsuit brought by Netchoice, a tech industry group. The Vermont Kids Code upholds free speech by focusing on platform designs and algorithms - not content removal - to mitigate harms, steering clear of regulating speech, there is no content moderation regime established in this bill. Opponents of this bill are trying to conflate regulating data privacy and design, with speech and content moderation, intentionally creating confusion and alarm. But the Vermont Kids Code specifically regulates data management practices and product design – it does not regulate protected speech under the First Amendment because it does not target content or require tech companies to moderate content differently, it is not content-based regulation. Ultimately, we believe that Big Tech must be responsible for its products — like its algorithms and addictive features — and the Kids Code does just that.

Big tech will say that this bill is going to be worse for privacy, that it will require mandatory facial recognition, ID checks, or other age verification. They will try to convince you that it is more privacy-invasive. But that is simply false. This bill does not mandate any form of age or identity verification; companies already make age approximations of users based on the data they collect.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/01/30/parental-controls-tiktok-instagram-use/>

Big tech will try to convince you that this bill is going to be harmful for LGBTQ+ and minority children. They are trying to stoke fear based on false information – this bill allows children of all identities to safely access age-appropriate information and essential resources. The bill includes explicit anti-discrimination language that expressly prohibits tech companies from making any design choice that discriminates against a child based on race, religion, national origin, disability, gender, and/or sexual orientation. The Kids Code’s strong privacy protections are important for LGBTQ+ youth, who receive more frequent recommendations to ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ strangers on social media. Stronger default privacy settings and better data protection fosters an online environment for everybody to safely grow, explore, and express themselves.

Big tech will try to persuade you to believe that this bill is going to harm innovation and business. But in reality, we know that smart regulation spurs innovation by incentivizing companies to proactively address risks and develop safer, more ethical products from the outset.

Finally, Big Tech will point you towards other piecemeal solutions that fail to target its business model, instead suggesting that classrooms should better educate younger users on online harms and law enforcement should play a greater role. While I agree that improving discussion in schools around these issues is necessary, teachers and schools have no power to turn off addictive features and harmful algorithms, by default. The Kids Code does just that and the Vermont legislature should pass this bill and sign this into law.

I hope you’ll find my perspective to be helpful as you listen to the next round of testimony today. I look forward to answering any of your questions and discussing this further. Thank you for having me.