



**Testimony of Kaitlynn Cherry,
Design It For Us**

Vermont House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

April 8, 2025

Chair Marcotte, Ranking Member White, and members of the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development. Thank you for inviting me to express my support for the Vermont Age Appropriate Design Code or S. 69.

My name is Kaitlynn Cherry. I'm 20 years old and currently studying international relations, Chinese, and computer science at Boston University. I'm originally from Manchester, Vermont. I'm here today to voice my strong support for the Vermont Age-Appropriate Design Code Act. I am part of a generation that has grown up at a pivotal transitional period of technology and innovation. In middle school, many of us received our first smartphones and naturally logged on to social media. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted us into a reliance on social media to keep us connected. I'm one of those lucky few who has a tech-savvy father. I'm incredibly grateful for his willingness to sit down and teach me about staying safe online and ensuring I always read the terms and conditions. In conjunction with my mother, they fostered a safe environment that balanced autonomy while also keeping a watchful eye. But having a support system like that is, unfortunately, not a reality for many. And we cannot put the onus on parents like mine to safeguard my generation.

I am here as an advocate with Design It For Us. Our coalition has over 250 members from across the country and around the world, including members in Vermont. Our coalition was founded in March of 2023, based on the then-Design It For Us campaign, which successfully advocated for the California Age-Appropriate Design Code, a bill that passed the California State Legislature unanimously and was signed into law in 2022. Last year, Design It For Us helped support the successful passage of the Kids Code in Maryland, and supported Vermont's strong fight last year to get its own Age-Appropriate Design Code over the finish line.

We are proud to see lawmakers stepping up again in Vermont and around the country to introduce and push age-appropriate design legislation. In lieu of federal standards protecting young people online, states must lead in this area and deliver legislation that tackles Big Tech's harmful business practices that addict and prey upon young people. The Vermont AADC 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 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.

Platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram were and are the apps of choice for my generation that allow us to communicate outside of our own local communities. There is no doubt that social media has provided my generation with many benefits and opportunities. However, similar to many components of life, social media is a double-edged sword. There is a darker side to social media that must be acknowledged. Big Tech's addictive algorithms hooked those middle schoolers from a young age and kept them scrolling.

Big Tech companies like Meta, which owns other platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, make money by pushing ads to users. Those ads are mixed in with the everyday content people post. Big Tech utilizes algorithms to decide what content to push out or recommend whom to potentially connect you with. Algorithms use personal information and users' data based on how they interact with the interface. The longer you stay on the app, the more ads you see. Over time, Big Tech has relied on these algorithms that have become more and more precise in serving content to users, keeping people on the platform longer. This means more ads, more revenue, and more data being collected to ensure the addictive cycle continues. The system is self-reinforcing and has been coined "[surveillance capitalism](#)," and includes mechanisms such as endless scrolling, autoplay, defaulting new accounts to public, and hiding or obscuring privacy controls. And with the increasing use of AI, these ads are becoming even more precise, using predictive modeling to produce the next ad. This creates an environment where young people are being guided by systems that they likely **don't** even know are influencing them.

Through my work researching the geopolitical implications of artificial intelligence and serving as a fellow for Boston University's pilot AI writing courses, I've seen how powerful and potentially harmful the combination of AI and vast datasets can be. Passing this bill isn't just about the now,

it's also about being proactive to ensure the future of social media protection of American kids and teens remains realistic and can keep pace with the rapid innovation seen in this field.

Many of my friends have developed depression, eating disorders, and have attempted to take their lives due to social media. This stage in a young person's life is a critical window for mental, emotional, and social development. We are developing logical reasoning skills. We are developing our moral compass, learning right from wrong. There should be protected spaces for us to learn, and right now, the manipulation and development of things such as deepfakes are only going to make these experiences harder to navigate.

As I mentioned, my background stems originally from the more technical side of things; however, throughout my research and conversations with middle, high school, and even college students, it has become clear that the ethical and emotional considerations of building technology and social media are just as important as the code behind it. Since middle school, I have watched as Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and others have evolved into dark spaces. Yes, they have connected friends and fostered community. Yet, at the same time, I have watched as peers—regardless of gender—develop anxiety, depression, and body image concerns in part or in full due to content they were repeatedly fed on social media. From unhealthy gym routines to online communities promoting eating disorders or certain vitamins, even things like lifestyle choices are under the influence of harmful algorithms and data directed by Big Tech. Even now, these challenges persist with my peers, and with the rise of AI, these systems are becoming even more complex, reinforcing specific norms shaped by data patterns that don't represent everyone.

Being from Vermont has always given me a sense of pride. The state embodies what it means to be small but mighty, and now Vermont has the opportunity to assist in guiding the country into a future where kids and teens are receiving much-needed protection by immediately enacting the Vermont AADC.

This is a common-sense consumer protection bill that would ensure that digital products, just like physical ones, are safe and private at the point of design. We have a responsibility and obligation to put in place guardrails that make these platforms safer. My experiences have made me realize what little control we have over the digital environment we live in. Right now, the people who are most impacted, kids and teens, don't get a say. It's clear more than ever that self-regulation doesn't work.

Finally, the AADC does not require companies to change their moderation standards or prevent people from searching for content. And it is good for businesses, allowing for continued innovation.

I hope you find my perspective to be helpful! Thank you for inviting me here today. I look forward to answering your questions.