Dear Vermont Legislators,

We are writing to support [current efforts](#) to enact social media design regulation in Vermont. We wrote about the importance of the Age Appropriate Design Code in our book and feel that this version of the bill, optimized for the current legal context, will provide important protections for Vermont's children.

We are the author and primary researcher of the book, *The Anxious Generation*, which documented the negative effects that smartphones and heavy use of social media has had on youth around the globe. The book has spent more than 40 weeks at the top of bestseller lists and has been used to motivate grassroots mobilization of students, teachers, administrators, and parents toward regulating social media platforms. Technology can certainly provide benefits to young people, but the current business incentives and design practices of some tech companies are leading them to cause vast harm to children and adolescents. Protecting kids from online harm is non-partisan, and supported by the majority of Americans. Legislators have the opportunity to take clear decisive action, joining the bi-partisan movement to protect kids' mental health, attention, and relationships by supporting reforms to how these products are designed.

Social media platforms, as they currently exist, are designed in ways that drive an unacceptable number of kids into crisis. As documented in our book and [our Substack](#), heavy social media use greatly increases the risk of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, addiction, and an array of other harms for adolescents. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of American kids are being harmed by these platforms every year. Despite the health costs of using these platforms, many kids continue to use them, in part because of [design patterns](#) and [AI powered algorithms](#) that maximize engagement. In fact, [one recent study](#) found 72% of kids report feeling manipulated by social media platforms. Children are still developing their ability to exhibit self-control in the face of immediate rewards—they know that they need help to control their online behavior. Kids' inability to control their use is no accident. The platforms are purposely designed to keep kids on screens, so that the companies can sell their attention to advertisers to increase profits.

The Vermont Age-Appropriate Design Code would make tech for kids safer by design. This legislation would improve young people's digital experiences by requiring tech companies to implement privacy-by-default and safety-by-design protections for kids online. This means that the companies will no longer be able to collect or sell their data, must set high privacy standards by default, and avoid manipulative design, such as the use of AI-powered algorithms optimized for time spent or to maximize user engagement.

The tech industry will likely suggest that this law is unconstitutional, unfeasible, or chills free expression. None of these charges are true.

The design changes required by this law are *content-neutral*—they do not impact what users' can or cannot say or read online. As such, regulating design is constitutional, as the Supreme Court has weighed in that design choices that have no intended message are not protected by the First Amendment. There is no message being conveyed by designing products for more

kids' attention. The goal is simply greater revenue. The design changes proposed in this bill are also doable, as a limited number of platforms have already made some of these changes voluntarily.

This bill has been designed by Rep. Priestly to incorporate Vermont's values and empower Vermont families. It reflects what we're learning as similar safety-by-design protections come into effect across the country and around the world. We cannot stand by while tech companies recklessly expose young people to unacceptable, avoidable, and unnecessary risks. There's no time to wait – we need our state legislators to pass the Vermont Age-Appropriate Design Code now.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Haidt
Zach Rausch