

Thank you for sharing your valuable time this afternoon. My name is Laura Derrendinger. I live in Middletown Springs, Vermont with my husband and 4 children who are ages 15, 13, 11 and 9. As you know it is now sugar season!! My children just hung their tapping buckets this weekend and are eagerly waiting to the sap to start flowing – and they will begin making their syrup.

This has become a joyful ritual for them every year.

As many of you know, part of small-scale traditional maple syrup production is to gather wood from the forest floor and chop it to fuel the fire for boiling. When my son was younger (11 and 12) he would handsaw all the wood he needed and chop it himself. When he turned 14 – has asked if he could use an electric chainsaw – to help speed up the process. He hangs about 25 buckets. So we decided that as long as he had safety training (which we provided with some local town experts) this would be OK.

When my son turned 14 – he did not get an iPhone or social media as most kids do these days – he received a chainsaw. We determined a chainsaw to be safer by significant orders of magnitude than him getting access to an iPhone & social media.

My background – before my current role as full time mom – I worked for Doctors Without Borders as a nurse in conflict. I mention this for 2 reasons.

- 1) Doctors Without Borders is an independent medical organization that does not accept funding from any entity, public or private that could create bias or compromise the integrity of how they respond to health crisis and the needs to the populations they serve.
- 2) In my work overseas with Doctors Without Borders, managing public health emergencies – we always worked to address whatever problem was at hand with multiple tools and interventions. In any public health situation – one policy tool alone will not be sufficient to achieve the goal of saving lives and decreasing illness in the population.

Today as I speak to you, I speak independently. I receive no funding or support from any commercial industry – meaning the following companies such as Google, Meta, At&t, Comcast, TikTock, Roblox, Disney, Amazon, Ebay, X etc etc – none of these entities give me money directly or indirectly.

So you can trust that my perspective on this topic reflects on independent research.

When we speak of Social media products, we first understand that we need to call them HEALTH HARMING PRODUCTS. When we can objectively call these products Health harming products, this changes how we decide to intervene.

Experts are not aware of a robust body of evidence that describes benefits from use. So when I speak, my approach mirrors our former US Surgeon General, who says that even when there might be some benefits we do not ask children to use social media to access benefits when the risks of use are so harmful. Cigarettes do tend to act to decrease appetite - we don't tell children or adults to smoke in order to lose weight.

In fall of 2023 the NYC health commissioner called social media an ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TOXIN. The weight of the independent research – research that is independent from commercial industry influence supports this description.

The Vermont Kids Code S69 is a well vetted and essential tool to make sure that if children are exposed to the health harming products of social media, risk of harm will be minimized.

In addition to the Kids Code – as with all public health interventions - the package of needed intervention will include as well –

- 1) phone and social media free schools,
- 2) age minimums for use such as Australia has just implemented
- 3) public education both in schools - we have a course book made by independent experts Kids Brains and Screens
- 4) Warning labels and product safety alters at the larger population level.

As I mentioned, my son and none of my children use iPhones – social media – video games etc.... The use of these products are not a requirement. We have determined that the science supports them spending time reading print books and spending time in the woods engaged in healthy risk taking. Personally, I am so aware of how harmful and toxic these products are - that in our family we do not use it.

As I said it is safer to give my kids a chainsaw than access to social media.

Unfortunately these products are ubiquitously placed everywhere -- (this is part of the business model – saturate every corner of children's lives with these products) - Most parents do not understand the extend of the harms - and for those of us who

do, I realize that my kids could be exposed to these products despite my best efforts. These products are in school, they are accessible to the library – and of course their peers use these products. The phone and social media free school legislation also attempts to address this by at least not putting children in a situation where they are required to use Snap Chat and Instagram for school.

I as a parent need your help. Please pass everything urgently that we need to keep our kids protected from these lethal harms.

Supporting research -

[References and publications re online and digital product exposure in youth "recreational and classroom exposure" - Google Docs](#)