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House Committee on Innovation, Internet, & Technology

Rhode Island State House

82 Smith Street

Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Baginski, Vice Chair Handy, Vice Chair Carson, and Members of the House Innovation, Internet, & Technology Committee,

My name is Evan Perez, and I am a student at The Met High School. I have spent my junior year focused on solutions to social media's harm on my generation. While originally designed for connection, social media has evolved into a competition for user attention, often at the expense of adolescents' mental health. Screen time surpasses sleep, children are restless without devices, and social pressures make it difficult to step away.

The introduction of H 5291 and the Rhode Island Age-Appropriate Design Code (AADC) represents a critical acknowledgment of these issues, but I believe the bills could be strengthened to have a more meaningful impact. Clearer standards for age verification, limiting manipulative design features (infinite scroll, autoplay, streaks), and ensuring strong enforcement mechanisms are necessary to prevent companies from easily bypassing regulation.

Additionally, I question whether the Attorney General's office alone has the capacity to enforce these regulations effectively. Given the complexity of defining and identifying 'dark patterns,' I urge the committee to consider appointing a specialized **tech advisory board** or a dedicated regulatory body with expertise in user experience design and behavioral psychology. New York's **SAFE For All Act** provides a strong model, empowering users with more control over their digital experiences and mitigating the harmful effects of algorithm-driven engagement. Rhode Island should look to this framework to strengthen its own approach.

Most importantly, while regulation is necessary, it alone will not solve the issue. Parents must be educated on the risks of social media and the intent behind these bills to ensure they don't inadvertently undermine protections by approving unrestricted access. I urge the committee to explore state-led digital literacy initiatives for parents alongside these regulations.

While I fully support the intent of H 5291 and AADC, their effectiveness depends on how well they are structured and enforced. Future legislation must go further—amend these bills to create stronger protections now, so young users aren't left vulnerable until 2026 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Evan Perez

The Met High School