



MARYLAND KIDS CODE

Every day children are using a digital world that is designed by and for adults, where they are nudged to give up their privacy, offered harmful material, and exposed to risky contacts and behaviors. To protect Maryland youth's privacy and safety online, the Maryland General Assembly should pass the Maryland Kids Code to make the digital world safe for children. Data protection regulation has the power to change the way digital products are designed and therefore minimize harm to children before they are put in risky situations online. Maryland has the opportunity to lead the way.

Protecting Maryland's Youth from the Dangers of the Internet

Maryland teens are spending a significant amount of time in front of a screen. Data-driven services are ubiquitous in today's world and make modern life much easier in a number of ways. However, those "free" online products are not actually free, but are designed to gather and share consumers' personal data. This personal data is shared in ways that create profit for the business, but can negatively impact the safety and wellbeing of children.

81%

of 14 to 22-year-olds say they used social media either "daily" or "almost constantly"

In Maryland, **67% of high school students** spend three or more hours per day in front of a screen according to the 2021 Maryland Youth pandemic Survey.

Of the top 100 free apps for kids in Google Play

1 in 3

have banner ads, including ads for adult content.

Current online features also "nudge" children into **risky behaviors**, expose them to predators, use dark patterns to recommend harmful material, encourage compulsive behavior, and enables, facilitates or promotes excessive information sharing, bullying, self-harm, eating disorders, sexual or substance abuse, and other potential harms.

75%

of the top social media platforms use AI to recommend children's profiles to strangers


These features are routinely built into a system designed by adults for use by adults, leaving children struggling to cope online. Depression, suicidal ideation, and other mental health issues are already high among Maryland teens. Their time spent online has the potential to increase these issues.

Creating the Internet Maryland's Youth Deserve

The Maryland Kids Code flips the script by placing the responsibilities on tech companies, instead of parents and teens. We know parents and teens are doing their best when it comes to social media. The harms that occur are not due to their irresponsibility, but rather are the result of intentional design features and use of personal data. As a result, the Maryland Kids Code does not simply provide additional parental controls or tools for users. Rather it acknowledges that these companies' profit models incentivize designs that are harmful to children and teens and requires that these companies assess and revise their products and services under a new duty of care model.


In order to accomplish this, the Maryland Kids Code is comprised of Age-Appropriate Design standards that would apply to all digital products and services that are reasonably likely to be accessed by children and teens. These core standards provide privacy and safety by design by: restricting data collection, sharing, profiling and the use of data in ways that are detrimental to children and teens; requiring high privacy settings be turned on by default; and, requiring companies take a risk-based approach to mitigating or eliminating the risk of harm stemming from their online services and products.

Support for the Maryland Kids Code



“There are three things that happen with our data: it gets taken from us when it shouldn't because we're children; it gets used to feed us harmful content that can make us feel bad about ourselves, give us further mental health issues than what's already sprung up because of world circumstances; and then it gets sold for profit. It's ridiculous that those three things are happening, and I think with this bill, Maryland can become a leader for the rest of the nation to show that this is not acceptable.”

Sam Ross, Maryland
High School student and youth advocate



“It's critical [state lawmakers] pass the Age Appropriate Design Code. Based on a proven legal framework that's already protecting kids in other nations and states, it creates 'seat belts' for kids on the internet - turning off features like location tracking and prohibiting the sale of kids' personal data. A recent poll of teens exposed how the design of social media and online platforms is actively harmful - adding further evidence for why design reforms outlined in the Age Appropriate Design Code are desperately needed to protect kids online.”

Frances Haugen, Facebook Whistleblower and advocate
for accountability and transparency in social media

Get Caught Up on the Maryland Kids Code in the Press:

- [MoCo delegate's bill would require social media sites to do more to safeguard kids](#), article by Ginny Bixby, covering the Maryland Kids Code and its potential impact
- [Maryland is the latest state to weigh online safety rules for kids](#), article by Cristiano Lima

For Further Information:

- See our website: <https://marylandkidscode.com>
- Coalition Contact: Jocelyn Collins - jcollins@policypartners.net