

January 11, 2024

The Honorable Bonnie Westlin  
Legislative Commission on Data Practices  
658 Cedar St.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: In support of the Age-Appropriate Design Code Act (SF 2810)

Dear Chair Westlin and members of the Legislative Commission on Data Practices,

My name is Kristi Wagner, I live in Hutchinson, MN, and I was really looking forward to addressing you in person today. But I now can't be here because we have just had to hospitalize my daughter Morgan again due to her anxiety and depression stemming from relentless body image and self esteem issues fueled by social media.

The fact that I can't even be here with you today should tell you everything you need to know about how social media is destroying children and devastating families. This is why we need your help and leadership. While I am trying to save my daughter, I am trying to save all of our children so I started speaking out in support of the Kids Code. I hope that by sharing my story, you will come to understand why supporting this bill is one of the most important things you can do for families across Minnesota.

The summer of 9th grade, Morgan's hockey coach told her she needed to work out more and gain muscle to succeed on the team. So, like most Gen Z kids, she started searching on social media for workout videos to improve her conditioning.

It didn't take long before the algorithms on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat started serving her dieting videos disguised as "healthy eating" routines, tips for skipping meals, and exercise suggestions for how to burn 1000 calories in a workout. The further she went down the rabbit hole, the more disturbing the messages she was internalizing became. She once wrote about her experience: "you see all these people on social media and then you get the belief in your head "my thighs can not touch, you can't have cellulite, you can't have a double chin whatsoever, you need to be able to see your hip bones. It is on your mind constantly, driving you insane."

When she entered treatment the first time, she had stopped hanging out with her friends to work out constantly and was eating just 100 calories a day. She eventually deleted TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat but felt like removing herself from social media cut her off even further from her friends. She even missed her senior Powder Puff football game because the invite only went out on Snapchat.

So, when she got out of treatment, she decided to try to get back on to social media. Within a week, she was being served videos that triggered her into restricting her calories again. In her own words, the cycle “was an endless pit, to be honest, with death at the end.”

Morgan’s “endless pit” is, in fact, an algorithm designed to increase user engagement so that tech companies get more of our children’s data to sell. Their profit model is our family’s waking nightmare.

Something has to change. We mandate safety standards and testing of every other product our kids play with. Why should tech be an exception?

Minnesota has the opportunity to be a leader in creating a better digital future for our kids. On behalf of my family and many other Minnesotans struggling with the impacts of unchecked tech, please recommend the Age Appropriate Design Code for passage in the 2024 legislative session.