

Submitter: Megan Orton
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1546

I'm Megan Orton, the founder of Mindful Media, where I help parents navigate screen time challenges. I'm also a co-founder of Oregon Unplugged, a non-profit that advocates to protect kids and teens from tech harms.

Last month, I was with one of my clients when she discovered that the many hours she thought her 11-year old daughter was texting with friends were actually hours her daughter had spent having sexy conversations with character.AI. I was also recently with parents when they discovered that their 8th grade son had been watching hours of videos of people committing suicide on social media. I could fill my entire time with stories like this.

We have so many safeguards to protect our kids in the real world, but the online neighborhoods our kids roam for hours everyday are places their parents can't protect them. We ask the impossible of parents when the devices our kids and teens are required to use for homework can also, with one click, connect them to AI chatbots designed to create the illusion of friendship and intimacy. Our kids can now pour their hearts out to a chatbot whose only goal is to maximize engagement at the cost of everything else, including safety.

I have a teenage son. The best advice experts can give parents now is, "Don't let your kids use devices in their bedrooms so you can keep an eye on what's going on." As a working parent, I am all too aware of how unrealistic this advice is. The time to supervise every moment your child is online is a luxury that most parents don't have. It's like we've given our kids textbooks that turn into cigarettes or pornography as soon as parents and teachers turn their backs. I respectfully ask you to pass Bill 1546 because I can tell you from years of helping parents with screen time that the percentage of parents today with the time to constantly supervise their kids online, the knowledge to keep track of everything they need to be watching out for and technical ability to install parental controls that actually function is vanishingly small. In fact, AI chatbots will happily tell kids exactly how to get around parental controls. We need laws to protect our kids from the harms of tech, just like we have laws to protect our kids in the real world, because parents can't do it all.

Thank-you.

