

## Testimony in Opposition to H7746

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am writing to respectfully voice my opposition to H7746, the “Rhode Island Children’s Online Safety Act”. Noble name, poor execution! The problems begin with the definition of “covered platform”:

a public or semi-public website, online service, online application, or mobile application that is used by a covered minor in this state and that allows users to create profiles, post content viewable by other users, and socially interact with other users as a significant part of the platform’s functionality.

This casts a net so wide that it even catches Wikipedia. The free online encyclopedia, one of the Internet’s great and unexpected success stories, is made entirely of user-generated content. People create profiles, post content (both within articles and in discussions behind the scenes), and socially interact with other users (a necessary part of the platform, since it is a collaborative effort). Wikipedia qualifies, by the plain meaning of the words, but there is neither a reason to consider it a threat to young people’s safety, nor a way to impose the restrictions that the law would require.

The law would also encompass the following:

- Discussion forums for niche interests (crochet, identifying local plants, discussing a favorite obscure TV show, etc.), that are run by volunteers, take no measures to monopolize attention or prolong the time users spend there, run minimal to no advertising, and could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered harmful to teenagers.
- Archive Of Our Own (AO3), a nonprofit website that hosts fanfiction and provides users with the ability to comment upon, bookmark and send kudos to the works of other users.
- Scirate, a nonprofit website where scientists and mathematicians bookmark and comment upon technical publications that have yet to be formally peer reviewed.
- Codeberg, a platform for sharing and collaborating upon open-source software.
- Stack Exchange, a network of user-driven Q&A websites on many topics that began with computer programming and has since expanded to include subjects across the sciences and the arts.

In short, the bill seems to have been written under the impression that Facebook, TikTok and Instagram constitute the entirety of the Internet. This is a bad way to legislate.

Moreover, even if we restrict attention to sites considered “social media” in a narrow sense, the bill’s restrictions are onerous and misguided. On a plain reading, they would bar, for example, 15-year-olds messaging their state legislators on Bluesky, asking a math professor for homework help on a forum, or sharing a video of ICE agents with a journalist. These are not interactions where the state should step in with the full force of law and demand a parental permission slip.

I can readily sympathize with the call to “hold Big Tech accountable”. I had an *I am not on Facebook* T-shirt 15 years ago. I co-moderate an independent, nonprofit web forum

that discusses the excesses and evils of the tech industry. I want to see an Internet that does right by young people. But this bill is not the way to do that.

Yours,  
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