YOUNG VOICES

April 7, 2026

Rhode Island General Assembly

82 Smith St. Providence, RI 02903

RE: Concerns Regarding H-7953, The Rhode Island Social Media Regulation Act

Dear Members of the House Committee on Innovation, Internet, & Technology:

My name is Peter Chung, and I serve as the Executive Director of Young Voices. Our organization is dedicated to transforming Rhode Island's urban youth into powerful advocates who have a voice in every aspect of their lives. We believe that youth can only achieve self-actualization when they play an active role in the organizing and decision-making processes. It is from this perspective of youth empowerment that I am writing to express concerns regarding H-7953, which would effectively ban the use of social media by minors in Rhode Island.

We acknowledge that the intentions behind this bill are rooted in a genuine desire to protect young people. There are undeniable and serious issues regarding teens' use of social media, including the prevalence of cyberbullying and the impact of spending excessive time on these platforms. These are challenges that our youth and their families navigate daily.

However, a total ban or overly restrictive regulations, such as those proposed in H-7953, which would prohibit any Rhode Island resident under 18 from holding a social media account, go too far. For many teenagers, social media is a vital tool for self-expression and connecting with like-minded peers. These platforms are often the first or only accessible sources of identity-affirming community and support networks, particularly for marginalized youth who may feel isolated in their physical environments.

Furthermore, we must be realistic about the effectiveness of such prohibitions. Youth will inevitably find workarounds to access these platforms, such as using fake ages, borrowed accounts, or migrating to less-moderated, "underground" spaces with even

YOUNG VOICES

fewer safety guardrails. Rather than making teens safer, a ban may simply sever them from demonstrated sources of information while pushing their online activity into spaces where they are less protected and where parents have less visibility.

In addition, the bill raises serious privacy and equity concerns related to parental consent and age-verification requirements. Any system that requires young people or their families to upload government-issued identification in order to access social media creates a troubling precedent for increased surveillance and data collection. It also assumes that every Rhode Island resident has access to valid identification, which is not the case for many families. Even more concerning, for some youth, particularly our

LGBTQ+ community, an ID may not reflect their correct name or gender marker. This could place them at risk of being outed, misgendered, or denied access altogether. These verification systems could unintentionally exclude the very youth who most rely on online spaces for support, while also exposing personal information to potential misuse, data breaches, or exploitation.

At Young Voices, we advocate for student-centered inquiry and the development of 21st Century skills, including critical thinking and communication. We urge the General Assembly to pursue a more thoughtful approach that engages teens directly in the conversation instead of outright banning the use of social media.

Sincerely,

Peter Chung
Executive Director
Young Voices

204 Westminster Street Suite 2A, Providence, RI 02903 Ph: (401) 214 - 8218
www.youngvoicesri.org