



March 17, 2026

Senator Victoria Gu

Chair, Senate Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Gu and Members of the Committee,

The AI Robotics Ethics Society at Brown University (AIRES at Brown) Policy Team is pleased to express our firm and urgent support for S2195 in instituting necessary regulatory provisions for artificial intelligence (AI) companion models, prioritizing the safety of the people of Rhode Island.

In the focus of technology and ethics, increasingly we're recognizing that AI companions represent a radical departure from traditional software. Sycophantic by curation, these AI companion models are engineered to mirror user's vulnerabilities and thereby forge emotional intimacy and psychological attachment. Accordingly, by reason of how these models are built, heightened safeguards are needed, especially considering the seriousness of the psychological space they occupy in the mental health of its users.

It is certainly not our policy team's stance that AI companions are inherently malicious or development should be completely halted; actually, we believe that these models have the potential to provide companionship to the isolated in our increasingly digital world. **But that's only if there are clear, enforceable guardrails to ensure that this simulation of "companionship" does not come at the expense of human life.** Rhode Island has the opportunity to lead the nation in addressing this correctly; we firmly believe S2195 is exactly the right step to not leave the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders defenseless against algorithms proven to be fatal.

We often talk about this idea of "disruption" in the tech industry, but in the context of unregulated AI chatbots, inaction's cost is not theoretical; inaction's cost is measured in human lives. We should not have to know the names Adam Raine, age 16, and Sewell Setzer III, age 14. We should not have to read autopsy reports and grieving parent testimonials linking suicide to interactions with unregulated AI companions. Their deaths could have—and future deaths would have been—prevented with the appropriate safeguards mandated by state action. Appropriate safeguards means preventing even the slightest possibility of algorithmic response inadvertently

encouraging (or worse romanticizing) and ignoring pleas for help; S2195 addresses this directly by requiring models to proactively identify and address suicidal ideation. For public safety, this is no optional matter. We cannot continue allowing companies to deploy models providing “intimacy-as-a-service” while disregarding basic moral responsibility to intervene when their user’s life is at stake.

As we anticipate potential pushback along the lines of regulation stifling innovation, we urge the opposite perspective: true innovation requires a stable foundation of public trust. If the concern is undue burden on developers, how will the entire industry continue to flourish given their AI products are linked to preventable tragedies? Given their products creates a climate of fear? Safety is only a pipedream if we allow technology companies to treat our citizens as beta testers for high-stakes emotional experiments without any accountability.

Adam Raine and Sewell Setzer III leave us with much to consider, but at its core, we must prioritize human safety over corporate immunity. We must put the people of Rhode Island ahead of the profits of a few large technology companies. We ask this Committee to stand for the dignity and safety of all users—especially the youth who are most at risk.

The way forward does not start with a “wait and see” approach while more harm accumulates. It starts with S2195. We strongly support this act and urge its immediate passage to ensure that the AI companions are implemented the way they’re meant to be: improve, not come at the expense of, human life.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to protecting the state’s most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

AI Robotics Ethics Society at Brown University

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