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House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 226 – Sponsor Testimony
Wednesday, May 20, 2025

Chairman Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on **House Bill 226, also known as the “App Store Accountability Act.”**

This legislation intends to protect Ohio’s children from potential harm in the digital world while empowering parents to make informed decisions about their children’s online footprint. Smartphones and the social media world have overexposed our children to various risks such as inappropriate online content and cyberbullying, and we’ve seen a huge increase in mental health concerns for minors.

During the last General Assembly, a similar policy was included in the operating budget which included age verification on an app-by-app basis. While this was a step in the right direction, these provisions faced legal challenges from the courts. House Bill 226 will instead implement age verification at the app store level. This new approach will strike the correct balance between protecting our children and upholding First Amendment free speech rights.

The App Store Accountability Act will require age verification for all app store purchases and downloads for minors, which will protect children from harmful content, reduce mental health risks, enhance data privacy, and encourage responsible technology use.

The process is simple: when a parent gets their child a smartphone, the parent can easily go into their app store account and confirm 1) they are the parent or guardian, and 2) the child’s age. Parents would only have to do this once within the app store - for example, with an ID or credit card - rather than go app by app. When a child tries to download an app onto their smartphone, the parent would receive a notification on their own phone to either approve or deny the download, putting parents, not the government, in charge of their child’s online access.

App stores already have these systems in place, like the “Ask to buy” feature. This proposal would just expand this system to cover any app the child wants to download. The app would not receive sensitive personal information like names of the parent or child. The app could just be told the age range of the child and whether their parent approves the download. This helps

ensure the child's age is accurately reflected across all of the apps the parent approves, and helps individual apps build stronger parental supervision tools and more age-appropriate experiences.

There is broad bipartisan support among Ohio's parents for a law requiring app stores to obtain parental approval for children to download apps.

A recent study conducted by The Tarrance Group surveyed registered Ohio voters who are parents of children under the age 18 at home. The polling data shows that:

- Fully eighty percent (80%) of parent voters support a law requiring app stores to obtain parental approval for children to download apps. There is considerable intensity behind this position, with fifty percent (50%) saying they strongly support such a law.
- This support reaches across both parties with Republicans at eighty-five percent (85%) support and Democratic voters at seventy-seven percent (77%) support.
- In a follow up question, seventy-two percent (72%) of parents say it would be easier to provide approval in one place such as an app store, instead of separately through each app.

Ohio's parents are largely speaking with one voice on this issue and want to be given the authority to approve downloads for their children through apps stores.

What this bill does is create a partnership that works for families. App stores verify age and obtain parental consent. App developers create safer experiences based on that verified information.

Similar legislation has been introduced in nine (9) states including: South Dakota, North Dakota, Illinois, New Mexico, Hawaii, Alaska, South Carolina, Texas, Utah... and Ohio makes number ten!

The Substitute Bill reflects similar language from the recently enacted Utah bill which closes dangerous loopholes, restores parental authority, and renames the bill the as the "App Store Accountability Act."

Thank you, Chair Thomas, Vice Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 226. Let's make Ohio a leader in protecting our kids online.

At this time, I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.