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Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 302

June 4, 2025

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Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 302.

I'm here today to present House Bill 302, which aims to create a safer online experience for children by establishing a balanced and practical framework for digital safety — one that promotes shared responsibility among parents, app developers, and app stores. Our goal is to ensure that families are protected and empowered in today's rapidly changing digital world, without sacrificing personal privacy or innovation.

We've all seen the risks that exist for children online. From inappropriate content and manipulative advertising to interactions with strangers or exposure to unregulated features, it's clear that the digital environment presents serious challenges. But the burden of addressing these challenges cannot — and should not — fall on just one group. We need a system that reflects the roles each participant in the ecosystem can and should play. That's exactly what HB 302 sets out to do.

Current proposals, including some seen in other states and at the federal level, often rely on sweeping requirements that sound helpful but have unintended consequences. For example, proposals that force app stores to share broad data about children with all apps on a device, regardless of need, may actually increase privacy risks. Others seek to tell parents exactly how they must supervise their children, taking decision-making out of the hands of families themselves.

House Bill 302 rejects those approaches in favor of a framework based on cooperation and clear lines of responsibility. Under the bill, app stores and developers are assigned distinct roles, while parents remain firmly in control of their child's data and digital experience. This approach protects children while respecting the different capacities and expertise of each party involved.

The bill outlines responsibilities for app stores, which serve as key access points for digital content:

## App Stores:

- **Provide age information to help developers provide age-appropriate experiences.** App stores would facilitate access to "industry standard" age signals where available. This includes tools for parental involvement and privacy protections built in.
- **Make it easier for parents to stay in control.** App stores would allow apps to surface parental controls in a single location, like a centralized dashboard. This provides parents with more effective tools to manage activities across different apps.
- **Encourage innovation in age assurance.** Developers could implement their own age estimation systems if they meet safety and privacy requirements. App Distribution Providers must provide the technical ability for developers to call an age signal where sharing is agreed upon.

These duties reflect what app stores are uniquely positioned to do — provide infrastructure, support consistency, and enable parental oversight in a scalable, privacy-conscious way. But the work of safety does not end there. App developers, who understand the intricacies of their own platforms, are responsible for implementing practical protections tailored to the risks present in their apps.

## Developers:

- **Ensure age signals are used safely and responsibly.** There would be clear consequences for improper use of age verification information. Developers must request only the minimum information needed and cannot share the age signal with third parties unless necessary for safety or privacy measures or required by law.
- **Require the right safety measures within apps.** If a user is not an adult, developers would be required to appropriately gate access to high-risk content and features. They must make a reasonable effort, proportionate to the risks, to ensure minors cannot engage in adult-only activities.
- **Prohibit the use of children's data to target ads.** Limiting data collection and targeted advertising for children improves privacy and safety.

This division of responsibility works because it reflects how the ecosystem actually functions. App developers have an intimate understanding of their product's features, risks, and user experience — and are best positioned to make decisions about safety controls and content gating. App stores can provide consistent tools and centralized access points, but they should not be forced to manage risks they can't fully assess. Parents, meanwhile, retain the final say in whether their child's age data is shared, with whom, and under what circumstances.

This model also avoids some of the pitfalls of broader regulatory mandates. It does not require developers to take on unnecessary burdens if their app poses minimal risk. It does not give app stores the power to impose rigid restrictions that may not apply to every child or every family. And it does not open the door to mass sharing of children's data, which we know can backfire and lead to

unintended harm. HB 302 is structured to provide meaningful protections where they're needed, without overreaching into areas where they're not.

Finally, this legislation is designed to evolve alongside technology. By allowing for flexible age verification methods and recognizing that not all digital content is the same, we give developers and app stores room to innovate while still holding them accountable for safety and privacy.

House Bill 302 reflects the reality that online safety is a shared obligation — one that cannot be met through blanket rules or one-size-fits-all mandates. It protects children by requiring meaningful safeguards, protects families by keeping them in control, and protects privacy by ensuring data is used only when necessary. It's a thoughtful, responsible, and effective step toward a safer online experience for Ohio's children.

Thank you again, Chair Thomas, and members of the committee, for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Thank you,

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