

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 302

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Chairman Thomas, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here and present testimony today.

My name is Rev. John Jones. I serve as President and CEO of HOPE Toledo. I also serve as an Associate Minister at Christian Temple Baptist Church, and I am a recently appointed member of Governor DeWine's Children and Youth Advisory Council. Most importantly, I am a father to four children. In each of these spaces, I have the fortune to hear from parents, grandparents, and educators who are trying to raise children in an environment that is changing faster than ever, especially when it comes to technology. Further, I have the privilege to engage young people in a variety of ways, allowing me to learn how they access technology and what they are doing with it.

What I respect about House Bill 302 is that it takes parents seriously. It doesn't put every decision in the hands of the government, nor in the hands of tech companies. Instead, it gives parents a stronger say when their kids are using higher-risk apps, which often feature chat rooms, sharing features, and content that may not be suitable for them to consume. At the same time, it doesn't bog families down in having to approve every single app a student might need for homework or to stay connected. That balance is important, especially in communities where kids already face enough barriers.

I think about our students at HOPE Toledo. Many rely on apps for tutoring, health resources, or just staying in touch with family, friends, and mentors. If you slow that access down, you can cut kids off from the very tools that keep them on track. HB 302 makes room for that while still giving parents the guardrails they've been asking for.

Additionally, I am in a position to serve children and youth from around the state of Ohio in my role as our church convention's Youth Director. The ability to access content that seemingly can get to them without them searching for it remains the consistent challenge faced by our young people. Many times, these issues can be averted by the applications ensuring the users do not have access to inappropriate content based on their age.

I also appreciate that this bill keeps the responsibility on the companies that build these apps. Parents should not be the only ones carrying the weight. Often, we vilify parents unnecessarily for things that are literally beyond their control. Developers need to design platforms that are safer for young people, while being more user-friendly for parents. HB 302 helps hold developers to that.

Finally, I know families who worry about how much of their child's data is floating around in the cloud. This bill avoids that trap. It shares only what's necessary, simply whether someone is a minor or an adult, instead of creating more ways for personal information to get out.

Personally, this is about making sure families have the tools they need to guide their children wisely, without cutting kids off from the support they rely on. HB 302 actually places the well-being of children at the center, and gives parents a voice to ensure our young people are both safe and connected.

Thank you for listening. I'm happy to answer any questions.