



**Ohio House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 302 Proponent Testimony
October 8th, 2025**

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on the critical issue of children's mental health.

My name is Vickie Thompson-Sandy, and I am President & CEO of **The Buckeye Ranch**, a statewide Ohio non-profit dedicated to restoring hope and providing healing for children, youth, and families through behavioral health, education, and child welfare services. Our mission places us directly on the front lines of the youth mental health crisis.

The Urgency of the Digital Mental Health Crisis

From our work across Ohio, we see firsthand that the harms our kids face online—from explicit content and manipulative advertising to privacy threats—are real, serious, and require effective legislative action.

- **The Problem is Acute:** We know that 1 child dies by suicide in Ohio every 33 hours and nationally 1 in 5 youth experience a mental health condition each year. The US Surgeon General has linked social media use to mental health issues. While social media use is not the sole cause of youth mental health challenges, we know that children are experiencing the devastating consequences of cyberbullying and unchecked digital exposure.
- **Addressing Life-Threatening Behaviors:** In our Intensive Home-Based Therapy (IHBT) program, our clinicians are trained to provide 24-hour crisis intervention for youth struggling with severe depression and self-harmful behaviors. We believe that helping families understand how they can assist their child with coping skills is essential; this includes addressing safeguards in the digital environment is essential to prevention.

Supporting a Shared, Privacy-First Responsibility Model

We urge this committee to support an effective, commonsense legislative approach that creates a **shared responsibility**. Our children's mental health is all of our responsibility, as is on-line safety. As a mental health provider, we know that parents want to protect their children and need simple solutions for online safety.

We support legislation that is built on the following core principles:



1. **Protecting Children:** We can pass laws that sound tough but don't actually work, or we can pass a law that offers real, practical protection. HB302 eliminates some of the loopholes and easy workarounds contained in other legislation.
2. **Prioritizing Privacy by Limiting Data Collection:** Being safe online should not require a child or parent to give up their personal information. The law must prevent unnecessary data collection
3. **Banning Manipulative Targeted Advertising:** We must stop companies from collecting a child's data to show them personalized or targeted advertisements, which can be manipulative or inappropriate.
4. **Ensuring Shared Responsibility:** The system must reflect a shared obligation among all participants in the digital ecosystem who must use age signals responsibly to implement appropriate safeguards.
5. **Empowering Parents with Control:** The law must put parents in control by requiring phones and devices to have easy-to-use content filters and parental control tools that are all in one central, easy-to-find place.

Conclusion

House Bill 302 offers thoughtful, responsible, and effective steps toward a safer online experience for Ohio's children that will not hinder their mental health.

On behalf of the thousands of children and families we serve across the state, we urge you to pass legislation that requires meaningful safeguards, keeps families in control, and protects privacy. Thank you, Chair Thomas, and members of the committee, for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Vickie Thompson-Sandy
President & CEO
The Buckeye Ranch