

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Zack Stephenson
Legislation Commission on Commerce Finance and Policy
100 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard.
St Paul, MN 55155

Re: In support of the Age-Appropriate Design Code Act (HF2257)

Dear Chair Stephenson and members of the Legislation Commission on Commerce Finance and Policy,

My name is Bridgette Norring and I live in Hastings, Minnesota. This is my son, Devin. He is forever 19 years-old after he bought a pill he thought was percocet that turned out to be fentanyl on Snapchat. His younger brother found him unresponsive in his room on April 4th, 2020. It was too late for us to save our precious son.

Devin died at the height of the pandemic. He had been suffering migraines and dental pain before lockdown began and was under a doctor's care, with a treatment plan for his cracked molar and an MRI scheduled to investigate his headaches. When those got canceled, he became increasingly desperate to relieve the pain.

After his death, I found out Devin and a friend had gone on Snapchat and found a drug dealer known for selling to local teens via the platform. I know now that social media platforms are a primary place where kids purchase all types of drugs and that, while most of them are not sold as fentanyl, many of them contain it.

I had talked to Devin and his brother about using social media safely before this tragedy but, afterward, I became obsessive about it with my younger son. We had multiple conversations about talking to strangers online and I monitored his social media usage like a hawk. I was quickly becoming an advocate for online safety and meeting moms from across the country whose children had also died due to online harms. I never in a million years imagined my other child could become a victim on the very same platform where his brother got the pill that killed him.

That nightmare is my reality now. We are not ready to talk much about this yet, because my son's life and privacy are paramount, but we are right now in the midst of dealing with another violation of my family and one of my children on social media.

Right now, social media companies are allowed to have a business model where our children, their most vulnerable users, are their most lucrative product. Their data can be sold to advertisers and the more they interact with the platform, the more detailed and therefore valuable that data becomes.

That means these companies are financially incentivized to design their products to increase engagement with features that become addictive, like nudges to engage, and use features like profiling to recommend accounts a child might like based on previous behavior. They make those recommendations even if that means connecting a child user to an adult stranger who might sell them drugs or otherwise put a child in harm's way.

This shouldn't be allowed. Every other product our children touch, from the car seat we bring them home in to the fireproof pajamas we dress them in at night, are required to meet specific safety requirements to be sold for use by kids, our most vulnerable population. Tech shouldn't be an exception.

That's why I am here today to ask you to vote for the Minnesota Kids Code. It is a framework that would require these platforms to evaluate the way their product interacts with kids with an eye toward safety rather than profit. It is a critical step toward shifting the burden of keeping kids safe online from resting entirely on parents to that burden being shared with companies from the moment they design their products.

I have lost one son to unregulated tech. I am fighting tooth and nail not to lose another one. I don't want a single other family to experience the pain mine has. I am a lifelong Minnesotan and I am proud that my home state has the opportunity to become a national leader in keeping kids safe online. I implore you to put the best interests of kids and families first and support the Minnesota Kids Code.