



March 13, 2022

Dear Members of the House Commerce Finance and Policy Committee:

One impact of the pandemic has been the increased use of social media by teenagers. While social media can help young people stay connected, it can also be detrimental to their mental health. Several investigations and studies are raising concerns about the impact of social media – particularly Tik Tok – on our young people’s mental health, particularly related to eating disorders and self-harm.

The Wall Street Journal’s investigation into the targeting of youth on social media found that the algorithms of Tik Tok sent many videos to youth about excessive alcohol use and eating disorders. But they were not alone in raising concerns. Frances Haugen, a whistleblower, showed how Instagram had a toxic effect on children, particularly related to eating disorders. The Guardian also conducted an investigation and found harmful eating disorder videos on Tik Tok as well. The University of Florida is researching the impact of social media on Tourette Syndrome. NAMI recently had a researcher from the U of MN Department of Psychiatry present on the topic as well. I have attached a recent study on this topic.

The big concern with Tik Tok is that is that a majority of their users are between the ages of 16 and 24. The algorithms used in Tik Tok create a personalized page which will suggest videos for you. If you click on one negative eating disorder video, you will soon start seeing more of them.

While it’s difficult to know exactly what the answer is to this phenomenon, it’s clear that something must be done to protect our youth. We appreciate the committee looking into this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director



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