WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF TYLER DIERS
TECHNET
MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE JUDICIARY FINANCE AND CIVIL LAW COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE JAMIE BECKER-FIN, CHAIR
IN OPPOSITION TO HF 3724

March 22, 2022

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Tyler Diers and I serve as the Midwest Executive Director for TechNet. TechNet is a national, bipartisan technology trade association advocating for the innovation economy at the federal and state level. We represent over 90 innovative member companies.

I am before you today on behalf of TechNet in opposition to HF 3724, an unworkable bill that would ban the use of algorithms on a certain demographic of Minnesotans.

If enacted, this bill would seek to upend how the internet works. The fact is, the internet as we know it today runs on algorithms. All online searching is accomplished through them. Email knows how to get to your inbox thanks to algorithms. Smartphone apps are nothing but algorithms. Computer and video games tell algorithmic storytelling. GPS mapping systems get people from point A to point B via algorithms. Algorithms help devices respond to voice commands, recognize faces, sort photos and build and drive cars. And yes, the material people see on social media is brought to them by algorithms. We use algorithms, to our benefit, all day long to complete tasks. We enjoy the conveniences algorithms bring to our daily lives.

There are many beneficial uses of algorithms in social media that would be greatly impacted should this bill become law. Social media algorithms are a way of sorting posts in a users' feed based on relevancy instead of publish time. If the platform doesn't show users things you're interested in, users won't come back. So, algorithms are built to learn what our preferences are as opposed to when they are posted. Under this bill, it would be permissible for a cereal company to advertise its sugary products to its audience on Nickelodeon but a social media platform could not recommend videos on how to grow leafy greens in an urban garden. This bill seeks to treat algorithms as inherently bad technology. Yet, when it's the government wanting to use algorithms, that's ok – they get a special carveout.

Algorithms also play an essential role in moderating content on social media platforms. They can be used to identify material that has already been banned such as pornography, bullying, harassment, and spam. These tools, some of which are based on machine learning, provide the capacity to manage content at a speed and scale that would not be possible for human moderators operating alone.

Lastly, the Minnesota legislature just last year approved a $1 million grant to a Minnesota-based nonprofit that promotes the balanced and intentional use of technology on Minnesota youth. The goal of the grant was to create an information and resource hub for all Minnesotans and would help identify a network of organizations to partner with to address issues like cyberbullying and suicide prevention – of which TechNet did not oppose. However, the grant program has not even been in effect for a full year, yet the we are already seeking to upend business models of companies. Instead, perhaps we should be examining the success or lack thereof of the Live More, Screen Less grant.

TechNet's member companies have created and implemented tools to provide insights into how much time they have spent in an app, changes to news feed quality to provide more opportunities for meaningful conversations and connections, privacy checkups that help people review the information on their profile, and snooze/take a break feature which allows people to hide certain pages, groups or people. Our member companies are addressing issues laid out in this bill and are implementing new tools for parents and users alike.

For these reasons we respectfully ask that you not move this bill this year.