



Oct 10, 2023

Joint Committee on Education  
Attn: Zachary Schwartz  
24 Beacon St  
Boston, MA 02133

## RE: H. 560 - An Act relative to media literacy in schools.

Dear Co-Chair Garlick, Co-Chair Lewis and Members of the Joint Committee on Education:

On behalf of the Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA), I write to support H. 560, An Act relative to media literacy in schools.

CCIA is an over 50-year-old not-for-profit international tech trade association that advocates for policy and market conditions that benefit innovation, the tech sector, and consumers.<sup>1</sup> We strongly believe children deserve an enhanced level of security and privacy online. Currently, there are a number of efforts among our members to incorporate protective design features into their websites and platforms.<sup>2</sup> CCIA's members have been leading the effort to raise the standard for teen safety and privacy across the tech industry by creating new features, settings, parental tools, and protections that are age-appropriate and tailored to the differing developmental needs of young people. In addition to those efforts, CCIA is strongly supportive of measures to incorporate media and digital literacy into the curriculum for K-12 students, as this education provides a vital resource for children and young adults, helping them understand how to consume media and navigate online spaces in a proper manner.

### 1. Digital literacy is widely seen as an essential life skill.

The phrase “digital literacy” has evolved significantly in the past decade. Digital education used to be reserved for knowledge workers — those who might use specific software at work and needed to be fluent in how to use it accordingly. Today, digital literacy means having the skills to thrive in a society where communication and access to information are increasingly done via digital technologies, such as online platforms and mobile devices, and H.560 would help support the development of such skills.<sup>3</sup> The demand for digital literacy skills has grown considerably over the past 20 years and is now expected even in roles unrelated to tech. However, a study from Pew Research<sup>4</sup> shows that Americans still lack basic understanding of digital topics. Most notably, Americans struggle most to answer basic questions correctly about large language models and online privacy. Even more concerning is that those with a high school diploma or less know the least about digital topics such as deepfakes, cookies, or two-factor authentication. CCIA believes it

<sup>1</sup> For more than 50 years, CCIA has promoted open markets, open systems, and open networks. CCIA members employ more than 1.6 million workers, invest more than \$100 billion in research and development, and contribute trillions of dollars in productivity to the global economy. A list of CCIA members is available at <https://www.ccianet.org/members>.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Rodell, *Why Implementing Education is a Logical Starting Point for Children's Safety Online*, Disruptive Competition Project (Feb. 7, 2023). <https://www.project-disco.org/privacy/020723-why-implementing-education-is-a-logical-starting-point-for-childrens-safety-online/>.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Christian, *Why “digital literacy” is now a workplace non-negotiable*, BBC Worklife (Sept. 26, 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220923-why-digital-literacy-is-now-a-workplace-non-negotiable>.

<sup>4</sup> Emily Vogels, Olivia Sidoti, *What Americans know about AI, Cybersecurity and big tech*, Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech (Aug. 17, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/08/17/what-americans-know-about-ai-cybersecurity-and-big-tech/>.

is crucial to close this gap by providing digital literacy and online stewardship curricula to teens and young adults. Just as many high schools across the country provide courses that prepare teens for college and the job market, digital literacy is increasingly important for jobs that are increasingly part of the digital economy.

Boston Children’s Digital Wellness lab acknowledges that it is critical to help kids learn to navigate digital spaces on their own, especially knowing that it is impossible to monitor their online activity 24/7.<sup>5</sup> Social-emotional skills like empathy, kindness, and personal responsibility, which are indeed crucial for offline interactions, can also be taught to enhance online interactions. Even for younger children, character education through digital citizenship is gaining traction in practice. According to a study on school children in the United States, 62% of K-2 teachers and 69% of grade 3-5 teachers report using some digital citizenship curriculum, with competencies related to developing positive character features being most common, such as understanding “digital drama” and hate speech.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. The use of online services, whether for personal or educational purposes, is part of everyday life for many young people.**

The Child Mind Institute, which develops and provides educators and school-based mental health professionals with evidence-based prevention and intervention training programs for schools K-12, has expressed that it is possible that removing access to social media and the internet from children may actually have adverse effects.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, many experts recommend that parents help young people learn self-regulation skills and proper online behavior similar to teaching them self-regulation when it comes to other personal habits and choices.

Social media effects are nuanced,<sup>8</sup> small at best, reciprocal over time, and gender-specific. Additionally, a study conducted by researchers from Columbia University, the University of Rochester, the University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge found that there is no evidence that associations between adolescents’ digital technology engagement and mental health problems have increased.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, the study shows that depression’s relation to both TV and social media use was practically zero. The researchers also acknowledged that it is possible, for example, that as a given technology becomes adopted by most individuals in a group, even individuals who do not use that technology could become indirectly affected by it, either through its impacts on peers or by them being deprived of a novel communication platform in which social life now takes place.

CCIA believes an alternative to solving these complex issues is to work with private businesses to continue their ongoing private efforts to implement mechanisms such as daily time limits or child-safe searching so

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Hunt, *Research brief: Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy*, The Digital Wellness Lab,

<https://digitalwellnesslab.org/research/research-brief-digital-citizenship-and-media-literacy/> (last accessed Sept. 5, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Alexis Lauricella, Jenna Herdzina, Michael Robb, *Early childhood educators’ teaching of Digital Citizenship Competencies*, Computers & Education (Dec. 2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0360131520301871>.

<sup>7</sup> JoJo Marshall, *When should you come between a teenager and their phone?*, Child Mind Institute (Dec. 19, 2022),

<https://childmind.org/article/when-should-you-come-between-a-teenager-and-her-phone/#what-happens-when-you-confiscate-that-phone>

<sup>8</sup> Amy Orben et al., *Social Media’s enduring effect on adolescent life satisfaction*, PNAS (May 6, 2019),

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1902058116>.

<sup>9</sup> Amy Orben, Andrew K. Przybylski, Matti Vuorre, *There Is No Evidence That Associations Between Adolescents’ Digital Technology Engagement and Mental Health Problems Have Increased*, Sage Journals (May 3, 2021), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2167702621994549>.



that families can make the choice about how they want to safely navigate social media. This is also why CCIA supports the implementation of digital citizenship curriculum in schools, to not only educate children on proper social media use but also help educate parents on what mechanisms are already out there that they can use now to protect their children the way they see fit and based on their family’s lived experiences.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Existing industry efforts to support child safety and privacy online could be bolstered by educational curricula focused on how to be a good online citizen.

Given the complexity of tackling this critical issue, existing industry efforts coupled with educational curricula focused on how to be a good citizen online can have positive impacts.<sup>11</sup> Offering such education to children would provide a more holistic approach to fostering children’s online safety. Specifically, we laud the efforts to identify standards of appropriate, responsible, and healthy online behavior, including cyberbullying prevention and response. Enabling young people to properly identify and respond to such behavior would promote safer online habits and may serve as a deterrent to engaging in such activities.<sup>12</sup>

Public officials have already begun empowering parents and teachers to help shape their approach to teaching children safe online behaviors. For example, North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein has introduced a campaign<sup>13</sup> that provides tools to help parents start a conversation with their children about internet safety, explain to parents and educators what security controls are already in place on many of these digital devices and services, and other useful tactics and tools to help parents make the best decisions regarding online use for their children.

Due to the many positive impacts social media and online services as a whole have had on connecting with loved ones, education, resources, and much more, it is imperative to educate young people on how to appropriately and effectively navigate these spaces to further facilitate these positive outcomes from internet use while also giving them the tools to protect themselves when negative occurrences arise.

\* \* \* \* \*

We appreciate the Committee's consideration of these comments and stand ready to provide additional information as the Legislature considers proposals related to technology policy.

Sincerely,

Alex Spyropoulos  
Regional State Policy Manager, Northeast  
Computer & Communications Industry Association

<sup>10</sup> See *supra* note 2.

<sup>11</sup> See Google’s *Be Internet Awesome* digital citizenship and internet safety curriculum guides, [https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en\\_us/](https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/).

<sup>12</sup> See New Jersey’s recently passed law signed by Governor Phil Murphy (D) on January 4, 2023, <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2022/S588>.

<sup>13</sup> See NCDNJ’s *Protect kids on the internet* safe internet guides for parents, educators, and caregivers, <https://ncdoj.gov/internet-safety/protect-kids-on-the-internet/>.