



March 17, 2025

The Honorable Anne Carney & Amy Kuhn
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee on Judiciary
Room 438, State House
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Please oppose LD 844

Dear Chairs Carney and Kuhn and members of the Committee:

On behalf of Chamber of Progress – a tech industry association supporting public policies to build a more inclusive society in which all people benefit from technological advancements – **respectfully urge you to oppose LD 844**, as it would threaten the privacy of all users and disproportionately impact marginalized youth.

One of Chamber of Progress' top priorities is protecting online privacy. We support rules to prevent particularly sensitive data from being used in harmful ways, and we are staunch supporters of efforts to create comprehensive privacy protections. We also strongly support making the internet safe for young people.

LD 844 would undermine the privacy and online experiences for all users

As written, LD 844 requires covered companies to verify the identity and age of ALL users – a tremendous encroachment of individual privacy. In fact, estimating the age of a user will require *more* data, acting contrary to data minimization efforts. Moreover, many adult users reasonably would prefer not to share their identifying information with online services - creating an unpleasant dilemma for adult users: turn over sensitive personal data to access protected speech online, or forego enjoyment of that online service entirely.

LD 844 may lead to online services opting out of gathering identifying information and opting instead to treat all users as minors. This would cause the curation of online content accordingly: in other words, covered platforms may turn entirely to children's programming and eliminate all content for adults, turning YouTube into YouTube Kids for everyone.

Compelling companies to gather personal information from so many users threatens cybersecurity. Specifically, services that cater to LGBTQ+ communities would be at particular risk for targeting since their data could be used for cyberbullying or blackmail. Privacy violations online often lead to offline violence. In 2024, LGBTQ+ people experienced increases in physical threats,¹ and in 2022, 54% of respondents reported experiencing severe harassment, including stalking, physical threats, and doxing.² And more broadly, malevolent actors will see any covered company as a ripe target for ransomware attacks. This is not a theoretical threat: recently, a company that offered verification services to online platforms was found to have left personal data unprotected, threatening the privacy of untold numbers of users.³

Disparate impact of age verification mandates on marginalized communities

Beyond privacy issues, the age verification requirement also poses accessibility challenges for many families, as LD 844 mandates age verification using a “government-issued identification document” and “documentation verifying parental authorization.” This raises concerns about access for those without official documentation, who are disproportionately marginalized communities. The University of Maryland found that “18% percent of Black adult citizens, 15% of Hispanic adult citizens, and 13% of Asian/Pacific Islander adult citizens do not have a license at all, compared to just 5% of White adult citizens.”⁴ LD 844 risks excluding historically marginalized communities from online spaces, further deepening existing digital disparities.

Digital consent laws may harm more than they may protect

LD 844 requires “verification of parental consent,” for minors who are “14 or 15 years of age” – an ambiguous provision that could create uncertainty in enforcement – and further bans individuals younger than 14 years of age from creating a social media account.

While it is important to encourage parental involvement to ensure minors’ safety online, parents are not always best suited to control how their child uses a platform. Consent laws, for example, can be weaponized by divorced parents who share custody of a child. If the parents are at odds with each other, they can use consent laws to override each

¹ See <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-06/online-hate-and-harassment-the-american-experience-v2024.pdf>

² See <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-09/Online-Hate-and-Harassment-Survey-2022.pdf>

³ See <https://www.404media.co/id-verification-service-for-tiktok-uber-x-exposed-driver-licenses-au10tix/>

⁴ See <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/pubs/Voter%20ID%202023%20survey%20Key%20Results%20Jan%202024%20%281%29.pdf>

other's decisions, especially when they disagree on what's in the best interest of their child.

Consent can also be used as a tool of control in abusive situations. According to the CDC, 55% of teens face violent and psychological abuse by parents and household grownups, including 58% of teens under age 16, 63% of girls, and 74% of LGBTQ+ teens and teens who regularly or often go online are also 41% less likely to attempt suicide and 62% less likely to be hospitalized for self-harm than rarely online teens given the support, connection, and community that teens often find online.⁵

LGBTQ+ youth, especially those who may live in communities hostile to their identity, see social media as a crucial tool to connect with LGBTQ+ groups, access content from people's shared experiences, maintain positive connections, and reduce perceived isolation.⁶ LGBTQ+ youth use online platforms to seek emotional support, search for information about their identities, and find communities that accept them when their own parents do not.⁷ In fact, less than half of Maine LGBTQ+ youth report living in affirming households,⁸ while 68% reported finding online spaces to be supportive, and 64% identified role models on social media.⁹

Legislation should not harm those it intends to protect. LD 844 would threaten privacy for everyone and restrict access to vital resources for marginalized communities – including LGBTQ+ youth. For these reasons, we encourage you to **oppose LD 844**.

Sincerely,



Brianna January
Director of State & Local Government Relations, Northeast US

⁵ See <https://www.cdc.gov/abes/data/index.html>

⁶ Cesar Escobar-Viera, et. al., "Examining Social Media Experiences and Attitudes Toward Technology-Based Interventions for Reducing Social Isolation Among LGBTQ Youth Living in Rural United States: An Online Qualitative Study." *Frontiers in Digital Health*, (2022). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35832658/>

⁷ Michele Ybarra, et. al., "Online social support as a buffer against online and offline peer and sexual victimization among U.S. LGBT and non-LGBT youth." *Child Abuse & Neglect* vol. 39 (2015). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S014521341400283X?via%3Dihub>

⁸ See <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Maine.pdf>

⁹ See <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>