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LD 2052

Testimony of Emily B. Cherkin, M.Ed.
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Re: Maine LD 2052 Resolve, to Study the Use of Technology in Classrooms and Study Safeguards Related to Its Use

Greetings, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee—

My name is Emily Cherkin. I am a parent, author, speaker, and educator. Last week, I testified before the U.S. Senate about the impact of technology on childhood. Today I am testifying in support of Maine's LD 2052: Resolve, to Study the Use of Technology in Classrooms and Study Safeguards Related to Its Use.

I do not accept funding from tech companies for my work.

I am here today with a warning: The enmeshment of technology in education is having a profound impact on childhood and student success and Maine should look critically at the use of educational technology in its schools. In fact, this should be among the top priorities of this committee.

The CEO of a large engineering firm recently told me: “We draw talent from the top universities around the country. But in spite of their technical skills, these new employees are completely unable to function as humans: they cannot communicate, problem-solve, or think creatively.”

Today, Maine students, like nearly 90% of American schoolchildren, are provided with 1:1 internet-connected devices for “learning” in spite of growing evidence that increased time on technology decreases learning.

It won’t matter if they know how to code if they can’t collaborate with a colleague to solve a problem.

Technology education is needed. But that is very different from the Educational Technology—or “EdTech” products being deployed in schools today. EdTech products do not prepare our children for the future. They are extractive, harmful, and unsafe—just like social media and smartphones.

As EdTech products flood our schools, I see three crises emerging: First, a learning crisis. Reading and math scores are plummeting. One study found that investing in air conditioning yields a 30% increase in learning outcomes over investing in tech. We are wasting education dollars on ineffective products.

Second, a creativity crisis. A 15-year-old in Kentucky told me older kids feel like the lucky ones. In an afterschool elementary school drama class she teaches, she said to the younger children: “Let’s pretend we’re flying!”

They looked at her and asked, ‘How?’“

If children can’t pretend to fly, they cannot imagine, and therefore, cannot innovate. Technology access in childhood does not enhance creativity; it kills it. Remember, today’s tech giants had analog, play-based childhoods.

Finally, the enmeshment of technology in childhood is a crisis for our democracy. When children spend hours being fed algorithmically-driven rage-bait content designed to increase engagement, they lose the ability to form their own opinions, detect bias, and think critically.

Whether at home or school, technology products are designed to hook and hold our attention, and children’s brains are especially vulnerable. Unfortunately, tech companies choose not to make these products safer because it would compromise profits.

So we must ask: if the business model of Big Tech and EdTech is fundamentally at odds with child development, and the intrusion of school-based screens into family

life undermines the choices parents can make, why are we handing them to children in the first place?

This is not a kid problem. It is an adult problem that is impacting children. But parents need help.

Any opportunity to study the effects of classroom technology on learning is an opportunity for policymakers to better understand the risks and find different solutions to protect both childhood and a future workforce.

When we know better, we can do better.

Thank you.