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I'm Ellen Coughlin-Quinn. I hold a master's degree in public health, and I am the mother of three children in Maine public schools. I am also a co-founder of the Scarborough Alliance for Thoughtful Tech and Turn the Tide Coalition. Both groups are advocating for more thoughtful technology use by our youth.

The problem of educational technology is bigger than any one district can solve, which is why I'm here asking for the state's help. At best, educational technology is failing our students. At worst, our children are being exploited by technology companies that design programs for profit.

Before I begin, I want to be clear: I am not blaming my local district. Administrators and volunteer school boards face competing priorities and have limited capacity. My goal is simply to illustrate the challenges parents face when trying to access clear and consistent information.

My concerns became personal last spring when at age nine, my son reported that classmates were playing Five Nights at Freddy's, a horror video game rated 12+, Fortnite, a violent game also rated 13+, and watching random YouTube videos during class.

I raised these concerns with school leadership and was assured that our district has one of the strictest technology approval processes in Maine. The horror game was eventually blocked, and Fortnite was said to be inaccessible (though as you have heard, students do find ways around restrictions). Meanwhile, YouTube remained available on all student laptops on "Restricted Mode," which was implied to be safe.

But YouTube in Restricted Mode is far from safe. Students can scroll freely on all their laptops, unlike when a teacher intentionally selects a video for class. Restricted Mode still allows ads, autoplay, and algorithmic recommendations. When I raised this with leadership, I was told to think of YouTube as a "library shelf." But YouTube is not a library—it's an engagement machine engineered to maximize emotional response and attention. Unrestricted access predictably leads to distraction, off-task behavior, and reduced learning.

Eventually, YouTube was blocked on Chromebooks for students under sixth grade, though older students still have access. When asked why, leadership cited educational purposes, such as 300 band students learning finger positioning on various instruments using YouTube. However, other curricula undergo formal evaluation before use, and textbooks or reference materials could achieve the same goal. This raises the question: do the potential educational benefits outweigh the negative impacts on focus and attention?

After speaking with other parents who shared my concerns, we decided to be less reactive and more proactive and asked the district leadership directly: How much time are our children spending on screens? And is artificial intelligence being used in their education?

On screen time, the district could only provide estimates, but estimates reflect intent, not reality. They do not capture what actually happens in classrooms, where practices vary widely.

On AI, we were told there was no student-facing AI in use. —but within minutes on my 5th grader's laptop, I found AI writing tools, AI editing tools, AI-powered search, and ChatGPT. ChatGPT, at worst, can cause psychological harm and, at best, removes the productive struggle essential to learning. Leadership explained that ChatGPT was previously locked down but something caused that restriction to lapse.

Leadership further explained that harmful tools can be blocked after harm is discovered. Even in a district that prides itself on thoughtful technology use, families are being asked to "see something, say something." This illustrates how large the influence of technology companies has become—and how difficult and overwhelming

it is for even well-intentioned leaders to manage it. It also shifts the burden of vigilance onto parents.

When again asked for concrete data, school leaders responded that the larger school district community is comfortable with the district's use of educational technology, effectively painting concerned parents as outliers. However, the written testimonies submitted by parents in my school district for this very bill tell a very different story.

I'll spare you more personal stories (though I have plenty!) and leave you with this one: My first grader recently discovered how to close out of the math portion in her math learning app at school—so she could enjoy the games within the app without the inconvenience of actually learning math.

These issues go beyond any one district—parents across Maine are asking reasonable questions and school districts are struggling to answer. My colleagues in neighboring school districts all have their own stories. Protecting children from harm or exploitation is a state responsibility, and state-level action is the only realistic path forward. I urge you to carefully study the use of educational technology in our schools.

Thank you for your time.