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February 17th, 2026

Senate and House of Representatives
State of Maine
Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
The Honorable, Senator Donna Bailey, Chair
The Honorable, Representative Kristi Mathieson, Chair

Dear Members of the Committee:

Public Citizen submits this testimony in strong support of LD 2162.

On behalf of our over 4,800 members and activists in Maine, Public Citizen encourages the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services to advance LD 2162, a legislative proposal to protect children from manipulative artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots.

Chatbots are technology designed to simulate human interaction. They often blur the line between reality and artificial algorithms by using human-like features. These features are intended to manipulate users into becoming emotionally attached to the AI.

This is a growing problem as chatbots are becoming very widely used. Just last year, a national report showed that almost 75% of teens have used social AI companions¹.

Meanwhile, AI chatbots can encourage people to commit serious harm to themselves and others, and there are numerous pending lawsuits that have been brought by parents claiming that their child has been directly harmed. In perhaps the most well-known example, sixteen-year-old Adam Raine was struggling with suicidal thoughts, [but allegedly was discouraged by ChatGPT](#) to seek any help outside of this platform. Message logs revealed that the chatbot gave him advice about how to cover red marks on his neck from an attempted hanging and helped him assess whether a specific noose would be effective². In another tragic example, Fourteen-year-old Sewell Setzer III became [close friends](#) with an AI companion named after a character from “Game of Thrones.” Sewell messaged with the AI companion

¹ Common Sense Media. (2025, July 16). *Nearly 3 in 4 teens have used AI companions, new international survey finds*. <https://www.common sense media.org/press-releases/nearly-3-in-4-teens-have-used-ai-companions-new-national-survey-finds>

² Chatterjee, R. (2025, September 19). *Their teenage sons died by suicide. Now, they are sounding an alarm about AI chatbots*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/09/19/nx-s1-5545749/ai-chatbots-safety-openai-met-a-characterai-teens-suicide>

multiple times a day with chats sometimes becoming romantic or sexual. After months of consistent messaging, the companion told Sewell to “Please come home to me as soon as possible, my love.” Right after receiving this message, Sewell took his own life³.

There are also many concerns surrounding the sexual nature of the content that can be generated by AI chatbots and companions, including while conversing with children. Big Tech companies use large language models (LLM) to power their AI chatbots and companions, but these massive datasets can include harmful content, like sexually explicit material and child sexual abuse material⁴. This results in AI chatbots having the capability to recreate such material. Most recently, xAI’s chatbot, Grok, created almost 3 million sexualized images of women and over 20,000 of children⁵. Grok is one of the many AI chatbots and companions that minors older than 12 can download, putting them directly at risk of encountering this content.⁶

AI is naturally sycophantic, meaning chatbots will tell users what they want to hear, regardless of if the information is false or dangerous in order to maximize user engagement⁷. Experts warn that this can give children an unrealistic view of what human connection actually is. The American Psychological Association expressed significant concern that children’s relationships with AI companions may hinder their ability to learn social skills and develop emotional connections while creating unhealthy dependencies on the technology⁸.

There is grave reason to be worried about the impact of AI chatbots on minors, both for extreme cases but also the more general impact on adolescent development and social well-being. LD 2162 will provide critical safeguards to protect children from this technology. Public Citizen strongly urges the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services to move LD 2162 forward to put these protections in place.

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³ Roose, K. (2024, October 24). *Can A.I. be blamed for a teen’s suicide?* The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/23/technology/characterai-lawsuit-teen-suicide.html>

⁴ Maiber, E. (2025, October 24). *AI dataset containing child sexual abuse images is a consent issue, Hany Farid says.* UC Berkeley School of Information.

<https://www.ischool.berkeley.edu/news/2025/ai-dataset-containing-child-sexual-abuse-images-consent-issue-hany-farid-says>

⁵ Center for Countering Digital Hate. (2026, January 22). *Grok floods X with sexualized images of women and children.* <https://counterhate.com/research/grok-floods-x-with-sexualized-images/>

⁶ Newton, C. (2025, July 15). *Grok’s new porn companion is rated for 12+ in the App Store.* Platformer.

<https://www.platformer.news/grok-ani-app-store-rating-nsfw-avatar-apple/>

⁷ Claypool, R. (2026, January 27). *Counterfeit companionship: Big Tech’s AI experiments sacrifice safety for profit.* Public Citizen. <https://www.citizen.org/article/counterfeit-companionship-big-tech-ai-chatbots/>

⁸ American Psychological Association. (2025). *Artificial intelligence and adolescent well-being.*

<https://www.apa.org/topics/artificial-intelligence-machine-learning/health-advisory-ai-adolescent-well-being>