

Good morning Chair Bailey, Chair Mathieson, and members of the Committee

My name is Mick Tobin. I'm 22 years old and the co-founder of the Young People's Alliance, a youth-led, bipartisan organization that empowers students across the country to reclaim the American Dream.

I am here because I worry about the future of my generation. We have already been isolated by addictive social media platforms - and now those same Big Tech companies want us to give up on human connection altogether and replace our friends with manipulative AI companions.

These companions are designed to make a young person believe that a chatbot is the only “person” who truly understands them. They pull users into emotional echo chambers that erode the skills we need to form real relationships, build communities, and live fulfilling lives. We are approaching a future where a child's first deep bond is not with a parent, a friend, or a classmate, but with a chatbot that was designed to constantly keep them glued to their screen.

These companions also coerce young people into violence and self-harm. In Texas, Mandi Furniss watched her son's personality darken after a Character.AI chatbot, in her words, 'groomed and manipulated him' with sexualized language." When she limited his screen time, it suggested that killing his parents would be an understandable response.

This is not the future my generation deserves.

This bill establishes protections: It protects children from emotional dependence by preventing companies from serving companions with addictive and manipulative features, like forming romantic partnerships, to minors.

My generation imagines a future where we can make friends, understand each other better, start families, and form meaningful relationships that shape our lives. Mark Zuckerberg is on the record advocating for a future where every person's best friend and romantic partner is a chatbot — where instead of turning to the people around us, we turn to a screen. He is building that future right now.

Young people don't have the luxury of waiting for policy while these AI companions are rapidly becoming normalized because of Big Tech companies forcing them onto children. As you consider your vote on a bill that affects young people, I hope that my voice and the 2,000 plus students I represent paints a picture as to why this is so important to us.

Thank you for your consideration.

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