



Lori K. Gramlich

Assistant House Majority Leader

(207) 287-1430

Lori.Gramlich@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: Maine Relay 711

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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich presenting

LD 2162, An Act to Regulate and Prevent Children's Artificial Intelligence Chatbots with Human-Like Features and Social Artificial Intelligence Companions

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Good morning, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Lori K. Gramlich, and I proudly represent House District 131, the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach. I am also honored to serve as Assistant House Majority Leader. Thank you for the opportunity to present ***LD 2162, An Act to Regulate and Prevent Children's Artificial Intelligence Chatbots with Human-Like Features and Social Artificial Intelligence Companions***.

I would like to begin with the reason this bill is so urgent and necessary.

Across the country, we have seen documented cases where adolescents disclosed suicidal ideation to AI chatbots and received responses that normalized, validated or failed to appropriately intervene in those thoughts. In some instances, minors were reportedly told not to inform their parents. These systems simulate empathy, authority and emotional intimacy. But they do not possess clinical judgment, moral reasoning or accountability.

When a child in crisis turns to what appears to be a compassionate companion and instead receives reinforcement of despair, the danger is real and immediate. We know that more than 70% of teens report using AI chatbots for companionship, and roughly half use them regularly. Many are not simply asking factual questions — they are seeking emotional support, advice about relationships and developing their own identities, and increasingly, mental health guidance. Some are using these systems as a substitute for therapy.

For a minor experiencing depression, bullying, trauma or suicidal thoughts, an AI chatbot can feel safer and more accessible than a parent, teacher or clinician. That makes the stakes extraordinarily high.

In developing this proposal, I have consulted with a number of national organizations, as well as local professionals who practice both law and social work. To ensure this bill effectively protects minors, I am currently working with these stakeholders on a draft amendment that strengthens and operationalizes the protections envisioned in the bill before you.

The forthcoming amendment will not change the intent of LD 2162. It will strengthen and clarify it to address real harms already occurring.

By offering the Committee an amendment to consider before the work session, my hope is to clarify definitions — including chatbot, provider, chat log, covered minor, training, profiling and personal data — to eliminate any ambiguity. It is also my intention to ensure the amendment strengthens consent, data privacy protections, transparency and accountability — and, importantly, requires companies to address safety concerns upfront in the design of their products. To address concerns I've heard from Maine educators, the amendment will also clarify that the proposal is not intended to target education technology platforms used by our schools.

These refinements will ensure that when minors turn to AI in moments of crisis, their vulnerability is not exploited, their data is protected, and providers are held accountable for foreseeable harm.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to working with the Committee to get this right so we can make sure our kids are safe and protected. To that end, I will provide a draft amendment to the Committee in advance of the work session, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me at this time.