

# Maine Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the CJPS committee:

My name is Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH (from Hallowell) and I am writing for members of the Maine AAP chapter, whose primary focus is the health and well being of children. Our position is neither for nor against this bill, since it deals with issues that are somewhat “out of our lane.” Both the national AAP organization and the Maine chapter, however, are committed to combatting the systemic forces that negatively impact outcomes for our patients, and we fear that facial recognition software might fit into that category.

Can a computer be racist? Obviously not, but the application of facial recognition technology, as you all know, has led to racist outcomes due to the decreased accuracy of the algorithms when applied to non-whites. Misuse of this technology can contribute to anxiety and distrust in populations that already suffer from anxiety and distrust. To assert that this phenomenon does not contribute negatively to health outcomes is not facing reality. American medicine has long recognized that minority populations have relatively poor health outcomes, but until recently did not pay much attention to the root causes of these findings. Accumulating epidemiologic investigations have revealed that health disparities are created by the "social determinants of health" -- poorer schools, less employment opportunities, unsafe housing, etc. -- along with the stresses and fears related to living in our society as a member of a minority.

Trust in our governmental institutions and police are key to any community's sense of security. A family that feels secure is much better prepared to deal with the challenge of parenting and create a home environment that improves the child's odds of a healthy outcome. Some communities might feel safer knowing that cameras are guarding their neighborhood, but others likely will not.

When the Twin Towers fell, I had the feeling that we were facing the end of privacy in America, and that the pendulum swing that balances civil liberties with security would be inexorably pushed towards security. There is no doubt that this has happened, with most of us being “wired” through our phones/computers and tracked by commercial interests – with the government also able to gain access.

How monitored and tracked should we be? It behooves us to be careful to avoid unintended consequences by establishing safeguards over our policing practices – and being vigilant to lower the risk of unintended consequences. Are the benefits of facial recognition technology worth the risk? Can the technology be made to be free of bias?

Until you are reasonably sure of the answers to these questions, it would be prudent to move with caution. In this era where, for the most part, society is moving to recognize and confront systemic racism, we don't want to put resources into technology that exacerbates it. Thank you for taking our viewpoint into consideration as you hear the arguments around LD 1585.