SAVE – Suicide Awareness Voices of Education – marks its 35th Anniversary this August. An anniversary that reminds us that despite our best efforts – and those of others committed to saving lives by preventing suicide – our work is not done.

Suicide is complex. There is no single reason why. And there’s no single solution to prevention. But we do know that America’s children have become the victims of social media companies putting profit above their mental health.

Before 2008 the suicide rate for young people was declining.

And then, in 2008 through 2018 the suicide rate among 13- and 14-year-olds more than doubled – from roughly two deaths per 100,000 teens in 2008 to five per 100,000 a decade later.

Suicide is now the leading cause of death for 13- and 14-year-olds in the United States.

From 2006 through 2015 the social media platforms our children are on today became public.

Coincidence?

Where there’s smoke, there’s fire. And the fire is destroying the future – and lives – of America’s children.

On April 14, 1994, the nation’s seven biggest tobacco company CEOS testified, under oath, and denied the addictive nature of nicotine. The Big Lie of Big Tobacco ultimately led Congress to move aggressively to protect the health and lives of Americans.

On January 31, 2024, CEOS of Big Tech came before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee where Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg denied that there is enough evidence linking the decline in children’s mental health to social media platforms.

Today’s Big Tech is our kids Big Tobacco, and the Big Lie is that there is no proof that social media is harming our children’s mental health.

It’s time we stop listening to Big Tech and their lobbyists who tell us that their products are safe and start listening to the everyday American parents who know they are not.

It’s time we, as a society, as leaders in our community, stand up to the outrage of a company actually measuring the value of the life of a teenager to be $270.

It’s time we reject the notion that our kids’ lives can be measured by the amount of profit a social media platform can make before they fix their products.

Industry funded schemes and promises to remove harmful content – create content ratings systems – are little more than public relation’s gimmicks.

The Minnesota Kids Code isn’t the only solution to help to prevent youth suicide and save lives – but it’s an important and proven one that deserves your support and vote.

Erich Mische

Executive Director

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education