



Testimony in Support of Limiting Social Media Algorithms
Jobs Omnibus Conference Committee
May 12, 2022

Dear Chair Pratt, Chair Noor, and Members of the Jobs Omnibus Conference Committee,

The Minnesota Catholic Conference, the public policy voice for the Catholic Church in Minnesota, writes to highlight the need to limit the use of social media algorithms on teens, which is included in the final House version of the Jobs, Energy, and Commerce Policy omnibus bill. You have the power to take an unprecedented step to protect teenagers by prohibiting the use of these algorithms that feed them inappropriate or unfiltered content and cultivate addictive behavior. We urge you to include this provision in the final Conference Committee Report.

Ninety-five percent of youth ages 13 to 17 have access to a smartphone, 45 percent say they are online “almost constantly,” and another 44 percent say they are on the internet several times a day, according to a 2018 Pew Research Study.¹ A 2016 study showed that those who spent the most time on social media and least time interacting with others face-to-face reported the most loneliness.² Social media is creating a false sense of friendship and connectedness for our youth.

Algorithms are intentionally designed to feed users more of what they see or click on. So, with TikTok, if you linger on a video for even a short period of time, the algorithm will take note and feed you additional similar content. This can be especially harmful to youth if the content promotes suicide ideation or self-harm, which it has been known to do. An example is the emerging link between TikTok related content and eating disorders in teen girls³—the TikTok hashtag “diet” has over 11 billion views.⁴ A document shared with the New York Times lays out the ultimate goal of TikTok, which is to add more daily active users by specifically cultivating addictive behavior through the spoon-fed algorithms that experts say cause the app to know them better than they even know themselves.⁵

We should stop Big Tech and their accompanying algorithms shepherd the lives of our children. With the inclusion of H.F. 3724 in the final Conference Committee Report, we can limit the control unsafe algorithms have over our children thereby freeing them from the grasp of social media giants. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Maggee Becker, Policy Associate

¹ Monica Anderson and Jinjin Jiang, Pew Research Center, “Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018,” May 31, 2018, found at: https://www.pewinternet.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/05/PI_2018.05.31_TeensTech_FINAL.pdf

² Summer Allen, American Psychological Association, “Social media’s growing impact on our lives,” September 20, 2019, found at: <https://www.apa.org/members/content/social-media-research>

³ Julie Jargon, The Wall Street Journal, “Teen Girls Are Still Getting TikTok-Related Tics—and Other Disorders”, March 26, 2022, found at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/teen-girls-are-still-getting-tiktok-related-tics-and-other-disorders-11648248555>

⁴ Leonard Sax, Institute for Family Studies, “Is TikTok Dangerous for Teens?” March 29, 2022, found at: <https://ifstudies.org/blog/is-tiktok-dangerous-for-teens->

⁵ Ben Smith, The New York Times, “How TickTok Reads Your Mind,” December 5, 2021, found at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/05/business/media/tiktok-algorithm.html>