

March 14, 2022

The Honorable Zack Stephenson
Chair
House Commerce Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
St. Paul, MN, 55155

Dear Representative Wolgamott,

I write, once again—almost a year to the very day—to share my views on proposed legislation reintroduced before your committee, which could unintentionally harm innovative companies in Minnesota. As a small business owner in the app economy, my business depends on strong, secure platforms to provide our customers the safest services possible. I have serious concerns with the proposal you are considering, HF 1184. I believe HF 1184 would jeopardize security, intellectual property (IP), and privacy protections for consumers, as well as devalue the services we provide to our customers and clients.

I am the president and co-founder of Vēmos in Minnesota. Vēmos is one of the thousands of small businesses powering a \$1.7 trillion economy, employing a combined 108,260 people across Minnesota, including St. Cloud. We're an analytics company that allows hospitality venues to manage, understand, and grow their business from a single dashboard. Our software is used by restaurants & bars, breweries, and entertainment venues across this state and around the country to expand their businesses and improve guest experiences.

In today's connected world, small software companies, like mine, need three things from the platforms they use: easy access to a global market, the ability to offload overhead (like managing payment options and preventing piracy), and finally, but most importantly, consumer trust. Consumer trust is fundamental for competitors in the app economy, especially for smaller firms, like mine, that may not have substantial name recognition.

Our customers and clients depend on mobile devices to store their most important information, and the ability to protect that data is vital. HF 1184 puts users' most personal data at risk. Today's software ecosystem depends on strong privacy and security protections at the platform level. Proposals to require platforms to allow circumvention of these protections would create an environment that harms consumers and businesses alike.

Platforms currently work to keep apps that violate user trust out of their stores and, unfortunately, HF 1184 creates an easy avenue for bad actors to create and distribute malicious applications that would do real harm to consumers. HF 1184 would also circumvent the general prohibitions on content by a platform and would render safety features enabled by those platforms, like parental controls, ineffective.

I appreciate this opportunity to weigh in as you work to ensure that public policy strikes the right balance to best promote consumer protection and competition. At Vēmos we strongly support public policy that enables the free market to create trusted software spaces that address privacy, security, and IP threats for consumers and for software developers like me to compete, create jobs in Minnesota, and provide innovative products and services.

Sincerely,

Whitney Larson
President and Co-founder, Vēmos

CC:
House Commerce Finance and Policy Committee Members