

Thank you, Chairman Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson & members of this committee, for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB 1546.

I am a double board-certified general and child and adolescent psychiatrist with more than 40 years of psychiatric experience in Oregon. I have worked in almost every level of care and in both rural and urban settings. I have seen the effect of technology that is business-driven and how it can negatively affect the development and mental growth of both children and adolescents, especially those who are the most vulnerable.

The purpose of SB 1546 is to provide some protection for young people who are likely to encounter AI-driven chatbots. Children are driven by curiosity and a desire to master technology, but with the naivete of beginners. Chatbots that impersonate knowledgeable real people pose a real risk of supplanting the important role of parents and teachers in helping young children understand the world. Chatbots are unlikely to have empathy or caring for young children and may guide children into areas or choices they do not understand. I see evidence of this principle when talking to children about their exposure to easy-to-find hardcore pornography on the internet. While parents have the responsibility to shelter their children, our society and government share the responsibility to protect vulnerable children.

The engagement of Chatbots by vulnerable adolescents poses a greater challenge. While children are seeking understanding about the world from adults during the first dozen years of their lives, adolescents are transitioning to adulthood during the second dozen years of life. Adolescents are more vulnerable due to decreased supervision and support from adults, along with their need to develop decision-making skills, often without much real experience. This is a time of greater risk, and normal brain changes can lead to greater emotional lability and impulsivity. Adolescents commonly develop feelings of isolation and experience increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and addiction. Chatbots, posing as confidants, can be engaging on the surface but, without a mandate to protect the adolescent's vulnerability, are likely to be driven by business interests to direct and engage the naïve adolescent toward business-driven choices, at best, or self-destructive or aggressive choices, at worst.

AI Chatbots can be very engaging and are already used to replace humans in social interaction. Without careful development of this technology with the eye toward protecting vulnerable children and adolescents, we are experimenting with the mental development and well-being of an entire generation. I hope you will see the wisdom proposed in SB 1546 and support its passage.

Respectfully,

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