



To: Chair Roger Chamberlain
Members of the Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee

From: Bharath Madhusudan
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Minnesota Government Data Practices Act governing private educational - Securly in Minnesota
Students, educators and school student safety, wellness, and engagement initiatives

Overview

On behalf of Securly, we appreciate and support the meaningful focus that the Minnesota Legislature is putting towards student privacy and safety as well as public safety in Minnesota. Given Senator Matthews and Representative Feist's Student Data Privacy legislation, SF2307, which would amend the section of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act governing private educational data on students, we wanted to take the opportunity to provide some background information about Securly and share perspective on the potential impact this legislation could have on the digital student safety movement.

We hope this context will help inform the decision-making on this important topic and shed light on how the proposed legislation could affect school districts, administrators, educators, and—most importantly—student safety in Minnesota, unless the legislative language is modified to accommodate the important safeguards provided by Securly and its peers.

Securly Background

- Securly was founded in 2013 and develops products that support educators' and schools' student safety, wellness, and engagement initiatives. Our mission is to foster safe and focused learning environments, while keeping students healthy and engaged.
 - Securly is proud to serve more than 15,000 schools worldwide, including both public school districts and private schools.
 - 109 public school districts and 37 private schools in Minnesota use the company's products.
 - Craig Larsen, the Information Systems Administrator at Eastern Carver County Schools, served on the 2021 Securly Educational Advisory Council (SEAC), a customer advisory board that influences Securly's strategic direction. The Carver County Schools Securly case study is attached.
- As K-12 education initiatives increasingly become digital, Securly's solutions help protect and support students by addressing three critical and interconnected components of whole-student success:
 - student safety,
 - student wellness, and
 - student engagement.

- Securly was founded with student safety as its core focus. Today Securly supports student safety both online, using a cloud-based web filter, and in person, through a school visitor management solution.
 - Securly’s Filter product, which helps schools identify and block access to harmful websites, provides a safe web browsing experience for students and serves a critical role in helping schools achieve CIPA compliance.
- Building on safety, Securly provides solutions that support students’ mental and emotional health. Securly’s AI-powered monitoring identifies bullying, self-harm, violence, and other potentially life-threatening situations, supported by analysis from a team of specialists.

Underpinning Securly’s platform are device and data management solutions that work behind the scenes to help ensure that students have safe, managed access to learning devices, and that administrators have the data they need to better support their students. All of Securly’s solutions have been designed to help students reach their full potential at school and in life.

- Securly is proud that its offerings have helped save the lives of over 1,650 students to-date.

Importantly, Securly and the 146 school districts and private schools in Minnesota that use our products, have concerns with specific provisions and language in SF2307 that we believe will be problematic if this legislation is passed as-is – particularly if it goes into effect during the upcoming school year.

Issues at Hand

Compliance and Timing

- Companies like Securly are integral to ensuring that schools can properly block and filter inappropriate content and websites, which is required for schools to remain CIPA compliant and receive E-Rate funding.
- School administrators and IT professionals face continuous stress and pressure to ensure CIPA compliance. CIPA’s compliance requirements are over 20 years old, and compliance solutions have evolved to their current state due to schools’ interpretation of CIPA. These products are designed to log all web browsing activity and are comparable in functionality. Therefore, if the bill becomes law in its current form, Securly and its peers, administrators, and IT professionals could potentially be left without a means to provide CIPA-compliant filtering for the upcoming school year.
- Like many companies in the industry, Securly has a very complex AI algorithm that underpins its technology.
 - Our solution correlates activities to give student services teams a more comprehensive view of a student’s wellness for early intervention. Altering the scope of what Securly’s AI can scan would impact our ability to help school counselors understand which students are suffering and most in need of support.

Student Safety

- Moreover, in the current climate, there are legitimate concerns about the potential for self-harm, cyberbullying, and other concerns related to student safety.
 - The [Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey conducted by the CDC in 2021](#) noted “approximately one in three high school students experienced poor mental health (most of the time or always) during the COVID-19 pandemic (37.1%) and during the past 30 days (31.1%).” During the 12 months prior to the survey, 44.2% experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness – up from the 36.7% noted in the CDC’s [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) conducted in 2019. The ABES survey from the CDC also noted that during the 12 months before the survey, 19.9% of students had seriously considered attempting suicide and 9% had

attempted suicide.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics declared a [National Health Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#). The declaration notes “rates of childhood mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010 and 2020 and by 2018 suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. The pandemic has intensified this crisis: across the country we have witnessed dramatic increases in Emergency Department visits for all mental health emergencies including suspected suicide attempts.”
- Securly uses a multi-pronged approach to identify students at risk of harming themselves or others. We combine natural language processing and sentiment analysis to flag content related to cyberbullying, self-harm, and violence based on a correlated and synthesized risk score. Flagged activities are sent via email to designated school contacts who are trained to appropriately handle these alerts in accordance with district guidelines. If a district uses Securly’s 24 services, alerts are evaluated by our trained specialists. Depending on the urgency of the alert, our trained specialists reach out to the district’s designated contact via SMS, call, or email. Roughly 80% of these alerts are related to suicide, self-harm, and depression.
- Indications that a student needs help may not always be obvious. There are numerous examples, but here is one situation that demonstrates how tools like Securly are able to help:
 - One student wrote an email describing struggles with self-harm and a reluctance to speak to her parents due to a concern that they wouldn’t take her seriously. Within four minutes of the student sending the email, Securly flagged the message for a school district. The district contacted the parent, who found the student in the middle of committing an act of self-harm and was able to intervene.
- The current language in the bill that allows exceptions for risks to the life of a student, focuses only on "imminent" threats. This language alone will not allow for the product to be as effective as it is today. Self-harm tendencies and ideation happen over time and gathering the "breadcrumbs" over a window of time is what helps Securly’s analyst team and schools differentiate true intent from what could be morbid curiosity.

Specific language that we believe should be amended so that Securly and other student protection platforms can continue our important work in Minnesota:

- SF 2307

Sec. 3. Minnesota Statutes 2020, section 13.32, is amended by adding a subdivision to read:

Subd. 14. School-issued devices. (a) Except as provided in paragraph (b), a government entity or technology provider must not electronically access or monitor:

(1) any location-tracking feature of a school-issued device;

(2) any audio or visual receiving, transmitting, or recording feature of a school-issued device; or

(3) student interactions with a school-issued device, including but not limited to keystrokes and web-browsing activity.

(b) A government entity or technology provider may only engage in activities prohibited by paragraph (a) if:

(1) the activity is limited to a noncommercial educational purpose for instruction by district employees, or technical support by district employees, and notice is provided in advance;

- We would recommend removing the language in the Senate bill that limits the activity to instructional or technical support and instead allow for a broader set of noncommercial educational purposes that include this focus on students’ wellness and safety.

Conclusion

The rise of technology in day-to-day life for all Americans – and in the classroom – has fundamentally and permanently changed the way we must think about student safety as a society. There is no denying that technological advancements are creating new and bigger problems for those tasked with ensuring student safety.

While there are logical and important concerns around potential privacy implications for children, technology also holds the power to protect students and provide potentially life-saving information to parents and administrators.

We appreciate your consideration and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

To the extent it is helpful, some of Securly's customers have offered to make themselves available to provide their perspective on the legislation. We'd be happy to arrange a conversation at your convenience.

Respectfully,



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