



February 14, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Senate Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building – 3 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – Senate Bill 739: Algorithmic Addiction Fund - Establishment

Dear Chair Beidle and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support Senate Bill 739: Algorithmic Addiction Fund – Establishment (SB 739). Algorithmic addiction can have detrimental effects on mental health, contributing to issues such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem. It can also impair cognitive function, disrupt sleep patterns, and hinder offline social interactions, all of which, in turn, impact an individual's mental health.

Algorithmic addiction refers to the compulsive use of digital devices and online platforms driven by algorithms that optimize user engagement and retention. This term encompasses addictive behaviors related to various online activities such as social media use, gaming, streaming services, and browsing the internet. Algorithmic addiction is characterized by a loss of control over one's online behavior, leading to excessive and often detrimental use of digital technologies. Individuals may find themselves spending excessive amounts of time online, neglecting real-life responsibilities, relationships, and activities. The addictive nature of digital platforms is often attributed to the algorithms that tailor content to user's preferences, creating a personalized and immersive online experience. These algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement by delivering content that is highly relevant and appealing to individuals, keeping them hooked for extended periods.

SB 739 seeks to create an algorithmic addiction fund that will then be used to conduct a statewide needs assessment to determine where resources are needed and best practices for algorithmic addiction prevention, intervention, and treatment, as well as outreach to primary



and secondary school students about the dangers of algorithmic addiction. Ultimately, the fund may be expanded to provide much-needed youth mental health services, as young people are most impacted by algorithmic addiction.

As such, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 739. If you have any questions concerning this testimony, please contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee