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Today, I stand before you not only as an educator and advocate but also as a mother. My 14-year-old daughter, along with her sophomore classmates at Westfield High School, was a confirmed victim of AI deep fake misuse perpetrated by her peers last year. AI technology, as complex and powerful as it is, presents both advancements and challenges to our society. While AI can greatly enhance many aspects of our lives, it also has the potential to harm your constituents deeply.

I am here not to dwell on how this incident has made us feel but rather to shift the narrative away from the victims and towards the perpetrators, the lack of accountability, lack of laws and the urgency of implementing effective safeguards.

Based on personal experience, I strongly believe there is a critical missing component in our approach to artificial intelligence, which is Education to Prevent Misuse. We should consider implementing AI literacy programs in schools to ensure our children comprehend the implications and responsibilities associated with using such powerful technologies safely and ethically. But more than that, these programs will prepare our children not only to protect themselves but also to thrive in an increasingly digital world. Understanding AI and its capabilities will allow them to critically assess and navigate potential manipulations by AI across several aspects of life. They will learn to cross-reference and validate what they see, read, and hear, therefore avoiding manipulation, scams, or misinformation. At the same time, they can harness this tool to bridge gaps between affluent and underserved communities, as well as rural and urban schools, in this manner providing equal access to resources and opportunities.

Simultaneously, we need robust Regulation and Legislation for Accountability. Currently, the absence of explicit school policies on AI, alongside a lack of specific civil and criminal laws, leaves a significant gap in our ability to hold bad actors accountable. In the incident involving my daughter, the lack of AI-specific guidelines at her school led to minimal disciplinary action against the perpetrators, who not only remained at the school but continued to attend classes and represent the school in sports till this day. The repeated excuse by the school was the absence of state and federal laws.

We also need a labeling tool for AI-generated content to inform recipients of its source. Deep fakes circulating within the digital ecosystem can harm victims professionally, educationally, personally, emotionally, and more, potentially destroying reputations and futures. We should not try to reinvent the wheel but rather learn from existing models. For instance, China proposed a labeling of deepfakes, requiring that any content capable of causing public confusion or significant alterations must be clearly watermarked. Perhaps we should consider implementing a similar policy.

I also would like to emphasize the urgent need to reform Section 230, especially given the rapid evolution of technology and the challenges posed by AI. Just as laws have adapted for self-driving versus traditional vehicles, it's crucial that Section 230 evolves to stay relevant and effective in today's digital landscape.

To tackle the spread of harmful online content, we should focus on solutions, starting with a roundtable involving leaders from major content holding platforms like Microsoft, Google, Apple, and Amazon. These companies have the expertise and resources to enact significant changes immediately, driven by social and ethical responsibility, while legislators are crafting laws to hold bad actors accountable.

Similarly, financial giants such as AMEX, PayPal, Chase, and Visa play a fundamental role in our digital ecosystem. It's essential they too engage proactively to prevent their platforms from facilitating harmful activities. Collaborative efforts with these institutions can help establish a secure and ethical transactional environment, showcasing a commitment to responsible business practices.

To protect our children and ensure a safe learning environment, we must do more than just react, we need proactive education, stern policies, timely enforcement, and tough legislation.

As AI continues to filter through every aspect of our lives, from simple tasks to complex decision-making processes, it is imperative that we educate our society about its potential and dangers. AI, the new calculator, is here to stay. Let us face this challenge head-on, recognize the need for regulation, and harness this tool to bridge educational and workforce gaps, providing equitable opportunities to advance, regardless of background.