

Good afternoon. It is my privilege to be speaking to you today. My name is Ava Gustin and I served on the State Board of Education's Blue Ribbon Task Force for Student Screen Time as the co-chair.

I began writing in a journal at the ripe age of 10 and have continued it since. And you might be saying, that's great Ava, but no one really cares about a schoolgirl's journal. Well, I think this might be helpful because it paints a picture, a picture of my life.

It starts with joy and excitement. May 16th, 2018: "I just got out of school today! I am excited but sad because I had to say goodbye to my teachers and my friends." May 25th, 2018 "I don't like waking up early but I love school."

Things later changed. September 13th, 2019: "I'm not going to lie, I had some trouble adjusting to junior high (like crying for a straight week every night after school." August 23rd, 2020: "In middle school, if you aren't in love with Tik Tok, you don't fit in. I don't have social media, and people treat me differently, like I'm stupid." Young Ava was struggling. She was starving for acceptance or to even relate to others, but that was something she would never get because of social media and smartphones.

And high school is where it gets worse, because Ava tries to get social media for a short while, because she sees adults encouraging her to do so. Every sport at school has a social media account, and she has to keep up. February 16th, 2022: "I come home and cry every night because I hate school so much." March 17th, 2020: "Maybe I should get Snapchat, but I don't want to." May 16th, 2022: "I feel like the constant problem is me. I feel like I don't relate to anyone."

And then in March of 2023, almost 16 year old Ava writes "I have an eating disorder now. Looks like all of my worries and insecurities from the past came through." May 2023: "The most worthless person I have ever met is myself. I have no impact on the world." August 8th,

2023: “I hate myself for not changing who I am to fit in like everyone else.” And finally, December 27th, 2023: “My eating disorder has control over my life. This has been so hard for so long, and I don’t know where to go from here. I know going back to school will be terrible.”

No 16 year old, or person for that matter, should ever feel those thoughts.

How could a girl that loves school become someone who didn’t trust her own worth? The answer is crystal clear. I never felt that I was enough because I never felt connected to my peers after early elementary school, when everyone began to get phones. My adolescence and teenage years were robbed by big tech companies. But now, you have the opportunity to change that outcome for Kansas students. Will you sit back and allow this story to continue, or will you rise up and defend Kansas children? I hope you make the right choice today, by voting in favor of House Bill 2421. Thank you.