Big Tech risks undermining itself on child safety laws, Vermont lawmaker says

31 Mar 2026 | 16:39 GMT | **Insight**
By Maria Dinzeo

As US states rapidly advance age-verification and child-safety laws, tech companies are undermining their own interests by using lobbyists to negotiate over these bills in statehouses rather than speaking to lawmakers directly, Vermont state Representative Monique Priestly said Tuesday.

As US states rapidly advance age-verification and child-safety laws, tech companies are undermining their own interests by using lobbyists to negotiate over these bills in statehouses rather than speaking to lawmakers directly, Vermont state Representative Monique Priestly said Tuesday.

Priestly, who co-sponsored Vermont's Age-Appropriate Design Code, which takes effect next year, said companies often rely on local contract lobbyists who lack technical and legal expertise and stick to scripted talking points, which makes it harder for lawmakers to craft legislation that protects kids without hurting business.

The process quickly becomes convoluted, she said, with proposals being run up the chain of multiple lawyers. "It's a game of telephone, and it's really obnoxious. It's even more difficult in the kids space, because it's not a good look for a company to come out and say that they want less tight protections for kids," she said. "So it's even more convoluted where they're working behind the scenes through different trade associations, and there's really no kind of good faith effort."

To build responsible privacy legislation, Priestly said she would prefer to talk to the privacy officers, technologists and in-house privacy counsel. But "we don't get that level."

Priestly made these remarks at one of the world's biggest privacy conferences* in Washington DC.

She said lawmakers have to sift through competing narratives from lobbyists and companies to determine what's actually happening, including whether some proposals are being pushed by Big Tech to tilt the regulatory landscape in their favor.

"It's a very confusing space, and really maybe dangerous to tech to not engage in a meaningful way," Priestly said.

On the sidelines of the conference, Priestly told MLex that some lobbyists are helpful because they bring the red lines she's asked for, but others try to run out the clock. "That's a tactic to make sure there's not enough time time to pass anything," she said, later noting that Vermont's legislative session ends in mid-May.

With roughly half of US states requiring some form of age verification, concerns are emerging that the push for compliance could create a new class of gatekeepers, where a limited number of vendors could come to dominate age-assurance services.

"There could be some really cool tech that comes out of this, and it could make the internet and apps safer for everybody of all ages, which is great. But at the same time, I'm concerned with [whether] we create this kind of monopolistic tier of entities who are the ones who every state and country starts saying, 'you have to go through these age-verification systems and not anybody else,' " Priestly said.

It also opens the door for unscrupulous players to enter the market, echoing concerns long associated with the data broker industry. "Are we also creating an entire new kind of ecosystem of players that need further regulation, because they may or may not be ... responsible in thinking about trying to actually protect people and instead collecting their data and sharing it."

**IAPP Global Summit 2026: Privacy-AI Governance, Washington, DC, March 30-April 1, 2026.*

Please email editors@mlex.com to contact the editorial staff regarding this story, or to submit the names of lawyers and advisers.

Downloaded on 01 Apr 2026 by maria.dinzeo@mlex.com
Redistribution authorized in accordance with User Terms in the MLex General Terms of Business. Copyright © 2026 MLex Limited

Related Portfolio(s):
Data Privacy & Security - Artificial Intelligence - IAPP Global Summit 2026 - MLex coverage (Global)

Areas of Interest: Artificial Intelligence, Data Privacy & Security

Industries: Computer Networks, Computing & Information Technology, Digital Economy, Social Media

Geographies: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, Oceania

Downloaded on 01 Apr 2026 by maria.dinzeo@mlex.com
Redistribution authorized in accordance with User Terms in the MLex General Terms of Business. Copyright © 2026 MLex Limited