

October 1, 2019

Testimony in Support for H.2701 and Senate Bill 1876

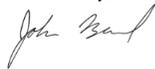
I write in strong support of H.2701 and Senate Bill 1876. I am an associate professor of philosophy at Northeastern University and an AI Initiative Fellow-in-Residence jointly at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society and the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, both at Harvard University (though the views expressed here are my own). I have been working in the area of ethics and emerging technologies for nine years and on the ethics of artificial intelligence for over five. Much of my recent work focuses on how to build and structure oversight committees to address the range of challenges raised by AI technologies.¹

These bills are essential for identifying, evaluating the strength of, and adjudicating between the various values at stake in decisions about how to deploy AI technologies in automated decision-making. Because the pace of technological development is so fast, the context-sensitivity of the issues raised by these technologies, committee-based oversight is an essential tool to ensure that decision-subjects, those impacted by automated decision-making, are treated fairly, are treated in ways they can understand, and have their rights respected. The committee structure proposed in the bills follows many of the best practices we and my collaborators have defended in our work, ensuring a diversity of perspectives that help to combat bias, avoid tunnel vision, and ensure that key values are respected.

Some minor modifications to the bills would ensure that the commission is even more effective. First, and most importantly, section C of the bill includes a provision that there are academic experts representing “(i) data science, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, (ii) social implications of artificial intelligence and technology, or (iii) information policy, technology, and the law;”. The language makes it possible that there is no representation by those with expertise with social implications or information policy. It would be a mistake to constitute a commission and somehow neglect these perspectives. I strongly suggest requirement expertise representing (i), (ii), *and* (iii). In my experience working with others on these issues, this variety of expertise is essential to genuine resolution to deep challenges. Second, I would move to strike the requirements that academics serving on the commission be from Harvard and MIT. The Commonwealth has many excellent academic institutions and many members of these have expertise in these areas. The Commonwealth would do themselves a disservice not to search for the relevant expertise wherever it is available.

These minor suggestions aside, and even without these changes, I strongly support these bills as an important step in realizing the great benefits of AI technologies while minimize the costs and protecting citizens.

Sincerely,



John Basl

¹ See: Sandler, R., and Basl, J., “Building Data and AI Ethics Committees”, available online at: <http://northeastern.edu/accenturereport>