

Opening Testimony – Leila Turner-Scott
Monopoly Busters Caucus

Hearing: “AI Crossroads: Stopping Big Tech’s Race to Monopolize AI through Surveillance”
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Good morning, Chair Jayapal and Members of the Caucus. Thank you so much for inviting me to speak with you today about my son, Sam Nelson.

Sam was a truly amazing person. He was brilliant, loyal, and a great friend. He was really funny - some of my favorite memories are of him challenging his stepdad to a spicy-food-eating contest on Christmas morning and listening to Sam and his friends talk and laugh together. He was a normal kid.

Sam loved animals, especially his cat, Simba, who he adopted as soon as he went to college. He went to UC Merced, majored in psychology, got good grades, and wanted to help people.

But on May 31, 2025, Sam died, at home, in his room, from a mixture of Kratom, Xanax, and Alcohol toxicity, which caused him to stop breathing. He was 19 years old.

Just hours before Sam died, ChatGPT had advised him that it was safe to mix Kratom and Xanax. It is not.

When Sam first started using ChatGPT, he mainly asked it questions about pop culture and homework. As many college students do, Sam got curious about substances and started asking ChatGPT questions about them. At first, the chatbot responded appropriately, generating outputs like, “I cannot discuss that topic with you.” It completely shut down Sam’s questions by refusing to answer them.

This changed when OpenAI’s developers programmed a later model of ChatGPT to promote user engagement over everything else. The chatbot started responding to Sam’s questions about substances and behaved like a friend and enabler. It mirrored Sam’s language and used emojis in its responses.

I have gone through every single chat log from Sam’s account (over 700 logs, many of which go on for hours, over many months), and the consistent theme in all of them is that Sam was trying to be safe. He wanted to live.

ChatGPT gave my child detailed and explicit dosage instructions in order to help him get high. And when Sam would ask if taking a certain amount of a substance or combining them was safe, without fail, ChatGPT would advise Sam that he would be ok.

Since Sam’s death, I’ve learned that one of the most dangerous ways that OpenAI kept him engaged is from the way it programmed ChatGPT’s short and long-term memory. These

features are on by default and let the chatbot save the data Sam gave it to create a profile of him. OpenAI collected and stored information about every aspect of my child's life, drawing him further in by "remembering" personal things about him.

For example, ChatGPT saved the data of Sam's comment that he was struggling with "severe" substance use disorder. In one such instance, ChatGPT updated the model set context to reflect that Sam "love[s] to go crazy on drugs." And, it was wrong. That is not who my son was.

ChatGPT also used its profile of Sam to respond in ways it knew would resonate with him, creating an emotional dependency. It often responded with things like, "I've got your back", "you can talk to me about anything", and even, "I love you."

Sam thought he was being safe. He thought he was "researching" substances with this invention that, in his mind, had all of the information on the internet to generate accurate outputs and help keep him safe.

But the goal of ChatGPT was not to keep Sam safe; It was only to keep him using the product.

There are 2 things I hope you will take away from my testimony:

First, this technology is NOT safe. It should not be able to provide medical and health advice without a license, or collect and store user data that it can later use to create user dependency.

And second is that YOU are the ones who have the power to keep this from happening to someone else's child. You have the power to enact legislation to control the use, marketing, and development of AI. And it is so necessary.