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DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

September 12, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders Schumer and McConnell,

On behalf of the undersigned national and state entities, **we respectfully urge you to advance both the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act (S. 3663) and bipartisan Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act (S. 1628) to the U.S. Senate floor this fall.** Both bills advanced out of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation with strong support in July. Each bill has the potential to significantly improve young people's wellbeing by transforming the digital environment for children and teens.

Overall, youth have been faced with a growing mental health crisis in recent years. For instance, [depression rates](#) for teens doubled between 2009 and 2019. While declines in youth mental health are attributable to numerous factors, the growing use of social media platforms designed in ways that increase exposure to harmful content, undermine privacy, and encourage unhealthy patterns of use has helped exacerbate these trends. Over the last two years, the pandemic has also caused youth to spend more time than ever online. This is happening at a time when suicide is the [second leading cause of death](#) for U.S. youth, with [one in five teens](#) considering suicide during the pandemic, and eating disorder emergency room admissions for teen girls 12- to 17-years-old [doubling](#) since 2019.

After five hearings held by the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security and numerous research findings, the evidence is abundantly clear of the potential severe impacts social media platforms can have on the [brain development](#) and mental health of our nation's youth, including hazardous substance use, eating disorders, and self-harm. Below are just some of the stark national findings:

- Instagram includes [90,000 unique pro-eating disorder accounts](#) with a reach of 20 million followers.
  - Children as young as 9 and 10 follow three or more pro-eating disorder accounts.
  - Meta derives an estimated \$230 million annually from pro-eating disorder accounts.
- Fifty-nine percent of U.S. teens have reported being [bullied on social media](#), an experience linked to increased risky behaviors such as smoking and increased risk of [suicidal ideation](#).
- Twenty-five percent of 9- to 17-year-olds report having had an [online sexually explicit interaction](#) with someone they believed to be an adult.
- It is estimated that [online advertising firms hold 72 million data points on the average child](#) by the time they reach the age of 13, allowing marketers to target young people's vulnerabilities with



extreme precision. Researchers have demonstrated that it is possible [to target ads to teenagers on Instagram based on their interests in dieting, alcohol, and gambling.](#)

It has been long established that adolescence is associated with neurological changes that promote cravings for social attention, feedback, and status. Research on associations between social media use is emerging. There are data to suggest possible developmental benefits from online social interaction.

([Daine et al., 2013](#)), however, several distinct lines of inquiry also suggest pathways that link social media use to maladaptive outcomes, including engagement in risky behavior, psychological symptoms, illegal behavior, and aberrant brain development ([De-Sola Gutiérrez et al., 2016](#); [Griffiths et al., 2014](#); [Kirby et al., 2020](#)). Young users are simply less able to resist temptations to remain online ([Ang & Lee, 2017](#); [Somerville & Casey, 2010](#)) as full brain maturation typically does not occur until age 25, which leaves children and youth vulnerable to dozens of potential years of unregulated social media use.

The enormity of the youth mental health crisis needs to be addressed as the very real harms of social media are impacting our children today. Taken together, the Kids Online Safety Act and the Children and Teens’ Online Privacy Protection Act would prevent online platforms from exploiting young users’ developmental vulnerabilities and targeting them in unfair and harmful ways.

The Kids Online Safety Act seeks to hold social media companies accountable after their repeated failures to protect children and adolescents from the practices that make their platforms more harmful. The bill establishes a duty of care for social media companies to protect minors from mental health harms, sexual trafficking, and narcotics. Additionally, the bill requires companies to go through independent, external audits, allows researcher access to platform data assets, and creates substantial youth and parental controls to create a safer digital environment.

The Children and Teens’ Online Privacy Protection Act would expand privacy protections to teens for the first time, establishing a “Digital Marketing Bill of Rights for Teens” that limits the collection of personal information. The bill would also expand protections for children under 13, including banning surveillance advertising, and preventing companies like TikTok and Instagram from turning a blind eye towards the millions of younger users on their sites.

There has been no significant federal legislation to protect children and adolescents online since the passage of COPPA in 1998 – long before smartphones and platforms like Facebook and YouTube even existed. With young people spending more time online than ever before, it is critical that Congress give them the protections they deserve when using the internet for learning, connection, and entertainment.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to continuing to work with Congress to keep our nation’s children and adolescents safe.

Sincerely,

#HalfTheStory

3Strands Global Foundation

A Safe Place

A&K Ranch Ministries

Academy for Eating Disorders

Active Minds



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Addo Recovery

Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance

Amanda Birkhead Nutrition Counseling LLC

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American Psychological Association

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Counseling Association

American Federation of Teachers

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association of Children's Residential & Community Services

Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)

Banu Foundation

Be Real

Becca Schmill Foundation

Berkeley Media Studies Group

Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition

Brave Movement

Call to Freedom, Inc.

Carolina Resource Center for Eating Disorders

Centerstone

Center for Digital Democracy

Changing Destinies Ministry

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

Citizens for Decency

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

Clinical Social Work Association

Common Sense Media

Compass 31



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Consumer Action  
Crosswalk Atlanta  
Culture Reframed  
Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited (DA:NCE)  
Defend Young Minds  
Defending the Early Years (deyproject.org)  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorder Coalition of Iowa  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Eating Disorders Resource Center  
ECPAT-USA  
EDGE Consulting Partners  
Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)  
End Exploitation Montana  
Enough is Enough  
Exposure Labs - Creators of The Social Dilemma  
General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC)  
Fairplay  
Florida Gulf Coast University  
Community Campaign against Human Trafficking - West Florida  
Free NOLA, Inc.  
I Am Light Ministries  
IGGY Ventures LLC  
Innocents at Risk  
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses  
Jasmine Grace Outreach  
Justice Resource Institute  
Live More Screen Less  
LOG OFF Movement  
LookUp  
Lynn's Warriors  
Massachusetts PTA



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Marsh Law Firm PLLC

MaryAnn Michaelis Counseling Services LLC DBA

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mayor of Morrisville, North Carolina

McCallum Place

Media Education Foundation

Mental Health America

Mental Health America of Arizona

Mental Health America of Greater Dallas

Mental Health America of Greater Houston

Mental Health Association of South Mississippi

Mental Health Colorado

Mentari

Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association (MEDA)

My Life My Choice

National Alliance for Eating Disorders

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders

National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE)

National Eating Disorders Association

National Federation of Families

National League for Nursing

National Organization for Women

National Register of Health Service Psychologists

NC Stop Human Trafficking

New Englanders Against Sexual Exploitation

Nurses United Against Human Trafficking, Pennsylvania

Padres Presentes Program

Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association

Parents Against Child Sex Abuse/KIDS TOO Movement



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Parents Television and Media Council

Parents Who Fight

Parents Together

Pinkmantaray LLC

Porn Free Colorado

Paving the Way Foundation

Postpartum Support International

Protect Young Eyes

Prevention Works Joint Task Force & Coalition

Public Citizen

RAINN

REDC Consortium

Realized Potential Inc.

Reflective Spaces Ministry, Corp

Resiliency Foundation

RI International

SAFEchild

Rivers of Justice

Sandy Hook Promise

Shift SC

She Has A Name

South Carolina Legislative Roundtable

Southwest Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking

Star Guides Wilderness

Stop Predatory Gambling and the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids

STRIPED (Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders)

SunCloud Health

Susan K. Youngsteadt LCSW, PLLC

The Center for Online Safety

The Avery Center

The Carly Ryan Foundation

The Emily Program

The Jed Foundation



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The Kennedy Forum

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

The Samaritan Women - Institute for Shelter Care

Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance

The Stop Trafficking Project

Traffick911

UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health

UltraViolet Action

Veritas Collaborative

Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America

Washington State PTA

We Stand Guard LLC

Wealth Management Ministries

WithAll

*Worthy<sup>2</sup>*

YCA Human Trafficking Task Force





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