

December 12, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the more than 230 undersigned national, state, and local organizations, **we are writing to urge you in your leadership capacity to include the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act (S. 3663) as well as strong privacy protections for kids and teens online in your end of year package.**

As you know, the bipartisan legislation passed the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation *unanimously* in July and 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 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 numerous hearings held by the U.S. House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce and the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security, and abundant research findings, the evidence is 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 report 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 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 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 lack of transparency into the inner workings, policies and measured impacts of these platforms must be addressed now. The impact of social media algorithms on the user experience is woefully understudied due in large part to the lack of visibility by researchers into the data and how algorithms work ([Epps-Darling et al., 2020](#); [Bravo et al., 2019](#)). 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.

Through your leadership, you both have the power to contribute to tackling this growing issue through advancing the Kids Online Safety Act and strong privacy protections for kids and teens online, as the wellbeing of future generations depend on it.

We thank you for your attention to this issue and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,

#HalfTheStory	American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
3Strands Global Foundation	American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
A Safe Place	American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
A&K Ranch Ministries, LLC	American Counseling Association
Academy for Eating Disorders	American Federation of Teachers
Accountable Tech	American Group Psychotherapy Association
Active Minds	American Mental Health Counselors Association
Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance	American Psychological Association
Alexander Neville Foundation	
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	
American Academy of Pediatrics	

ANAD (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders)

Angels of Fentanyl

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC)

Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)

Banu Foundation

Bay Area Nutrition, LLC

Be Real

Becca Schmill Foundation

Berkeley Media Studies Group

Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition

Brave Movement

Caleb's Song, Inc.

Call to Freedom, Inc.

Carolina Resource Center for Eating Disorders

Center for Intuitive Eating

Center for Online Safety

Chains Interrupted

Changing Destinies Ministry

ChildFund International

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

Citizens for Decency

Clinical Social Work Association

Coalition for the Advancement and Application of Psychological Science (CAAPS) Executive Committee

Community Campaign against Human Trafficking – West Florida

Community Care Network

Compass 31

Consumer Action

Consumer Federation of America

Crosswalk Atlanta

Culture Reframed

Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited (DANCE)

Defend Young Minds

Defending the Early Years (deyproject.org)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Disability Connection

Eating Disorder Coalition of Iowa

Eating Disorder Hope

Eating Disorder Registered Dietitians & Professionals

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Eating Disorders Resource Center

ECPAT-USA	Indiana – Centerstone
EDGE Consulting Partners	Innocents at Risk
El Pueblo	Inseparable
Empower Wellness, Inc.	Integrative Life Network
End Exploitation Montana	International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
Enough Is Enough	Iowa – Steps of Hope
Exposure Labs, The Creators of The Social Dilemma	Jasmine Grace Outreach
Fairplay	Jubilee Havens
Families as Allies	Justice Resource Institute
Families Fighting Fentanyl	Kansas – McCallum Place
Fighting to Save Lives – Jacob’s Legacy Foundation	Kentucky – Centerstone
Florida – Centerstone	Lives for Luke
Florida Gulf Coast University	LOG OFF Movement
For Cameron, Inc.	LookUp.live
Forever 15 Project	Lost Voices of Fentanyl
Friends of the Earth	Lucy Schaefer Croston Foundation
General Federation of Woman's Clubs (GFWC)	Lynn Meadows Discovery Center Summer Camp
Georgia – Veritas Collaborative	Lynn's Warriors
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice	Marsh Law Firm PLLC
Global Hope 365	MaryAnn Michaelis Counseling Services LLC DBA Addo Recovery
Holistic Moms Network	Massachusetts PTA
Hoops Care LLC	Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
I AM LIGHT MINISTRIES	Mayor of Morrisville, North Carolina
IGGY Ventures LLC	Media Education Foundation
Illinois – Centerstone	Mental Health America

Mental Health America of Arizona	National Association of Social Workers
Mental Health America of Greater Dallas	National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
Mental Health America of Greater Houston	National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders
Mental Health America of West Central Indiana	National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE)
Mental Health Association of South Mississippi	National Eating Disorders Association
Mental Health Strategic Impact Initiative (S2i)	National Education Association
Mentari	National Federation of Families
Michigan Eating Disorders Alliance	National League for Nursing
Millie Mattered – Overdose and Addiction Advocacy	National Organization for Women
Minnesota – The Emily Program	National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Mississippi Chapter – American Academy of Pediatrics	NC Stop Human Trafficking
Missouri – McCallum Place	New Englanders Against Sexual Exploitation (NEASE)
Mom Congress	North Carolina – Amanda Birkhead Nutrition Counseling LLC
MS Harm Reduction Initiative	North Carolina – Lutz, Alexander & Associates Therapy
Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association (MEDA)	North Carolina – Veritas Collaborative
My Life My Choice	Nutrition 4 You, LLC
National Alliance for Eating Disorders	Oasis Mental Wellness, LLC
National Alliance on Mental Illness – Pierce County	Ohio - The Emily Program
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)	Opal: Food + Body Wisdom
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health	Oregon - Amanda Birkhead Nutrition Counseling LLC
National Association for Rural Mental Health	Oregon – Lutz, Alexander & Associates Nutrition Therapy
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors	Padres Presentes Program
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners	

Pan Pacific and Southeast Asia Women's Association

Parents Against Child Sex Abuse/ KIDS TOO Movement

Parents Who Fight

ParentsTogether

Paving the Way Foundation

Peace Educators Allied for Children Everywhere, Inc.

Pennsylvania – Nurses United Against Human Trafficking

Pennsylvania – The Emily Program

Pinkmantaray LLC

Porn Free Colorado

Postpartum Support International

Project HEAL

Project Maria

Prosperity Eating Disorders and Wellness

Protect Young Eyes

Public Citizen

Public Good Law Center

RAINN

Ravenhawk Recovery LLC

Realized Potential Inc

REDC Consortium

Reflective Spaces Ministry, Corp

Relatives Against Purdue Pharma (RAPP)

Resiliency Foundation

RI International, Inc.

Roots Nutrition, FLG

SAFEchild

Sandy Hook Promise

Save our Children Support Group

Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance

Serenity Family Over Fentanyl, Let Our Voices Be Heard

She Has a Name

Shift SC

SMART Recovery

South Carolina Legislative Roundtable

Southwest Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking

Star Guides Wilderness

Stop Predatory Gambling and the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids

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

SunCloud Health

Susan K. Youngsteadt LCSW, PLLC

Tennessee – Centerstone

The American Association for Promoting the Child's Right to Play, IPAUSA.org

The Avery Center

The Carly Ryan Foundation

The Epidemic Memorial Wall

The Kennedy Forum

The Mental Health Strategic Impact

Initiative (S2i)

The National Alliance to Advance
Adolescent Health

The Samaritan Women – Institute for Shelter
Care

The Stop Trafficking Project

The Tech Oversight Project

Traffick911

Travis County Overdose Prevention
Endeavor

Twig & Thread Consulting

Tyler Clementi Foundation

U.S. PIRG

UNICEF USA

University of Connecticut Rudd Center for Food
Policy & Health

Vermont – Addiction Recovery Channel CCTV

Victims of Illicit Drugs

Virginia – Veritas Collaborative

Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North
America

Washington – The Emily Program

Washington Association for the
Education of Young Children

Washington Chapter of the
American Academy of Pediatrics

Washington Nature Preschool
Association

We Stand Guard LLC

WealthManagementMinistries – Prevention
Works Joint Task Force & Coalition

Wired Human

WithAll

worthy²

YCA Human Trafficking Task Force

YourMomCares

Zachariah Plunks Foundation