The Kids Online Safety Act of 2023

Sponsored by Senators Blumenthal and Blackburn

Background

As Congressional hearings, media reports, academic research, and heartbreaking stories from families have repeatedly shown, online platforms can have a harmful effect on children and teens: fostering body image issues, creating addictive use, promoting products that are dangerous for young audiences, and fueling bullying and other destructive behaviors.

The Kids Online Safety Act provides kids and parents with the tools, safeguards, and transparency they need to protect against threats to children's health and wellbeing online. The legislation would require that online platforms put the interests of children first, providing an environment that is safe by default. The Kids Online Safety Act also ensures that parents and policymakers know whether online platforms are taking meaningful steps to address risks to kids by requiring independent audits and supporting public scrutiny from experts and academic researchers. The Kids Online Safety Act of 2023 builds on the version from the 117th Congress by clarifying key definitions and rules to better focus on urgent harms to kids.

Summary

Providing Parents and Kids Safeguards and Tools to Protect Kids' Experiences Online

- Requires social media platforms to provide minors with options to protect their information, disable addictive product features, and opt out of personalized algorithmic recommendations. Platforms are required to enable the strongest settings by default.

- Gives parents new controls to help support their children and spot harmful behaviors and provides them (as well as schools) a dedicated channel to report any harms to kids.

Creating Accountability for Online Platforms' Harms to Kids

- Creates a duty for online platforms to prevent and mitigate specific dangers to minors, including promotion of suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, advertisements for certain illegal products (e.g. tobacco and alcohol), and other matters.

- Requires large social media platforms to perform an annual independent audit that assesses the risks to minors, their compliance with this Act, and whether the platform is taking meaningful steps to prevent those harms.

Opening Up Black Box Algorithms

- Provides academic and nonprofit organizations with access to critical datasets from online platforms to foster research regarding harms to the safety and well-being of minors.

Endorsements

The Kids Online Safety Act has been endorsed by organizations and associations representing mental health experts, nurses, parents' groups, young people, consumer advocates, faith groups, tech experts, and other communities, including Common Sense Media, American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Compass, Eating Disorders Coalition, Fairplay, Mental Health America, and Digital Progress Institute.