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June X, 2023

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Justice, and Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Justice, and Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Cruz,

On behalf of the XXX undersigned national, state, and local organizations, **we are writing to urge you in your leadership capacity to move the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act (S. 1409) as well as strong privacy protections for kids and teens online toward swift passage out of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation this summer and move to the floor for a vote.**

As you know, the bipartisan legislation passed out of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation *unanimously* last Congress and its reintroduction in the 118th Congress continues to have 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. 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. 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 have [contributed to these trends](#).

After numerous hearings and abundant research findings, the evidence is clear of the potential harms 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



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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. Aberrations in our brain growth during these periods may have lifetime implications. While research on associations between social media use is emerging, there are [data to suggest possible developmental benefits](#) from online social interaction. 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](#)

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, sex 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. 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.

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, particularly the harms we know [dramatically impact](#) the LGBTQ+ communities.

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.



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

Sincerely,