



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

October 24, 2023

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

We write to you as grieving parents and survivors. We have lost our children to suicide in the wake of relentless cyberbullying. We have lost our children to fentanyl poisoning from drugs purchased through social media. We have lost our children to dangerous viral “challenges” that took their lives. **We have lost our children because time and time again, Big Tech chose to prioritize profits over the safety and wellbeing of young people.**

We cannot wait another day, let alone another year. Children are dying. We urge you to bring Senate Bill 1409, the *Kids Online Safety Act* (KOSA) to a floor vote.

We know the internet is vital for kids to stay connected with their friends and classmates. That is why it's crucial to prioritize the development of safe online environments. As parents raising our children in the digital age, we did everything we were supposed to. We were open with our children about the dangers they might encounter online and how to react to them, warned them against speaking to strangers on the internet, encouraged them to come to us with their worries. And still, that wasn't enough: even an engaged parent with all the time and resources in the world doesn't stand a chance against manipulative design features and profit-seeking algorithms pushing harmful content to their kids.

Big Tech's abject failure to regulate themselves and protect the young people using their products could not come at a worse time for American children and teens. Between 2010 and

2020, the suicide death rate increased 62% for teens.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, global rates of depression and anxiety among young people were 25% and 20% respectively.<sup>2</sup> Rates of emergency room visits for children and teens for depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric issues rose by 28% between 2011 and 2015.<sup>3</sup> US emergency rooms saw more teen girls admitted for eating disorders during the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Fatal overdoses among teens doubled between 2019 and 2020, and rose by another 20% in 2021.<sup>5</sup> In 2022, over 3,000 minors were targeted in sextortion cases online - leading to more than a dozen suicides.<sup>6</sup>

The mental health crisis is not happening in a vacuum: a well-established body of research (some from tech companies themselves) shows how algorithmic amplification and social media exacerbate these problems for young people. Malicious actors use social media to sexually exploit children and to financially extort them through threats of distributing intimate images.<sup>7</sup> A recent *Wall Street Journal* report found that Instagram's algorithm helps connect and promote a network of child sex abuse material (CSAM) and guides pedophiles to content sellers through its recommendation systems. When users search for terms related to CSAM, a pop-up warns them that "These results may contain images of child sexual abuse," but still allows users to "See results anyway."<sup>8</sup>

The Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health echoes our concern for young people and urges policymakers to develop age-appropriate standards for tech platforms. The report mentions the harms perpetuated by social media, such as disordered eating, diminished self-esteem, and social comparison. Forty-six percent of adolescents expressed that their body image was negatively impacted by social media and two-thirds of

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<sup>1</sup> Saunders, H., Jun 22, N. P. P., & 2022. (2022, June 22). A Look at Suicide Rates Ahead of 988 Launch—A National Three-Digit Suicide Prevention Hotline. *KFF*. <https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/a-look-a-suicide-rates-ahead-of-988-launch-a-national-three-digit-suicide-prevention-hotline/>

<sup>2</sup> Racine, N., McArthur, B. A., Cooke, J. E., Eirich, R., Zhu, J., & Madigan, S. (2021). Global Prevalence of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms in Children and Adolescents During COVID-19: A Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 175(11), 1142–1150. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2482>

<sup>3</sup> Kalb, L. G., Stapp, E. K., Ballard, E. D., Hologue, C., Keefer, A., & Riley, A. (2019). Trends in Psychiatric Emergency Department Visits Among Youth and Young Adults in the US. *Pediatrics*, 143(4), e20182192. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2192>

<sup>4</sup> Radhakrishnan, L. (2022). Pediatric Emergency Department Visits Associated with Mental Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 2019–January 2022. *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 71. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7108e2>

<sup>5</sup> Friedman, J., Godvin, M., Shover, C. L., Gone, J. P., Hansen, H., & Schriger, D. L. (2022). Trends in Drug Overdose Deaths Among US Adolescents, January 2010 to June 2021. *JAMA*, 327(14), 1398–1400. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2022.2847>

<sup>6</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigations. (2022, December 19). FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes. FBI. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-and-partners-issue-national-publicsafety-alert-on-financial-sextortion-schemes>

<sup>7</sup> Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Walsh, W., & Treitman, L. (2018). Sextortion of Minors: Characteristics and Dynamics. *The Journal of adolescent health*, 62(1), 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.08.014>

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Horwitz and Katherine Blunt, Instagram Connects Vast Pedophile Network, *Wall Street Journal*, (June 7, 2023), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/instagram-vast-pedophile-network-4ab7189?mod=djemalertNEWS>

adolescents encounter hate-driven content either “often” or “sometimes.”<sup>9</sup> At a time when youth are using social media at increasingly earlier ages, the burden of minimizing the risk of harm on these platforms cannot be placed on the shoulders of children and families.

We know from first-hand experience how digital platforms can turn the normal trials and tribulations of adolescence into incomprehensible tragedy. Young people cannot wait for further studies and research—their development and childhood are happening now. Big Tech must be held accountable for the business decisions that are taking our children’s lives.

This is why the *Kids Online Safety Act* is so urgently needed. KOSA shifts responsibility for the design and operation of online platforms away from families and onto the companies that own them. At the heart of the bill is a duty of care that requires platforms to prevent and mitigate the most serious harms to young people: suicide, eating disorders, mental health harms, cyberbullying, illegal drug sales, and sexual exploitation. Critically, it also requires platforms to address addictive patterns of use—social media addiction is often the pathway through which so many serious and deadly harms to young people occur.

KOSA also provides parents and young people themselves with better tools to protect themselves online. The bill requires platforms to turn on the most protective settings by default, rather than sending parents and young people through a maze of confusing settings in order to turn off geolocation tracking, adjust account privacy settings, or prevent messages from strangers. Further, it gives young people the ability to avoid dangerous content rabbit holes by controlling the types of content that is recommended to them and to opt out of features that are designed to keep them online. It requires social media companies to work with an outside auditor to assess the risks of harm to minors on the platforms and the platform’s prevention and mitigation efforts. And when a young person or family is in crisis, KOSA requires online platforms to track and respond to issue reports – a feature many of us desperately needed.

**American families need the *Kids Online Safety Act* now: we cannot delay any more. Every single day that social media remains unregulated, more children are lost to its harms.** Please, pass the *Kids Online Safety Act*.

Sincerely,

Devon Adame  
Parent to Kayden, forever age 16

Erica Adams  
Parent to Daniel

Blair F. Aranda  
Parent to Brantley, forever age 17

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<sup>9</sup> Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory, US Department of Health and Human Services. News release, (May 23, 2023), <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/23/surgeon-general-issues-new-advisory-about-effects-social-media-use-has-youth-mental-health.html>

Christina Arlington-Smith  
Parent to Lalani, forever age 8

Julianna Arnold  
Parent to Coco, forever age 17

Karen Alfonso  
Parent to forever age 22

Hanh Badger  
Parent to BB, forever age 17

Steve and Joann Bogard  
Parents to Mason, forever age 15

Kristin Bride  
Parent to Carson, forever age 16

Rose Bronstein  
Parent to Nate, forever age 15

Tricia and Kinyoun Buford  
Parents to Braden, forever age 22

Kristina Cahak  
Parent to Morgan, forever age 15

Stephen Cahill  
Parent to Michael, forever age 20

Dani Clewell  
Parent to Alexander, forever age 18

Patrick Cly,  
Parent of Vanessa, forever age 18

Christopher A Dawley  
Parent to Christopher (CJ), forever age 17

Elizabeth Davis  
Parent to Cooper, forever age 16

Jennie and Dave Desario  
Parents to Mason, forever age 16

Jessica Diacont  
Parent to Jacob, forever age 15

James Ebert  
Parent to Jayson, forever age 21

Sonja Frezghi  
Parent to Khalif, forever age 17

Joseph Ryan Gill  
Parent to Emma, forever age 16

John Halligan  
Parent to Ryan, forever age 13

Desiree Hawkins  
Parent to Noah, forever age 12

Fran Humphrey  
Parent to Sophia, forever age 20

Taj Jensen  
Parent to Tanner, forever age 20

Karey Kleeman  
Parent to Aiden, forever age 14

Katherine Klingele  
Parent to Seqouyah, forever age 16

Melessa Kocsis  
Parent to AJ, forever age 19

Michael Kuch  
Parent to Adriana, forever age 14

Krystal Lebofsky  
Parent to Deja Star, forever age 12

Shannon Lee  
Parent to Ashlyn, forever age 16

Hazel Msuorga Lopez  
Parent to Paris, forever age 14

Patti Lujan  
Parent to Lauren, forever age 18

Christina Luna  
Parent to Josiah, forever age 15

Laura Lynch  
Parent to Brillion, forever age 18

Shailyn Malone  
Parent to Taylen, forever age 15

Kristine Mandelke  
Parent to Jonathan, forever age 22

Janet Majewski  
Parent to Emily, forever age 14

Kathy McCarthy  
Parent to Jack, forever age 19

Christine McComas  
Parent to Grace, forever age 15

Annie McGrath  
Parent to Griffin, forever age 13

Shawane Miller  
Parent to Leon

Todd Minor Sr.  
Parent to Matthew, forever age 12

Jennifer Mitchell  
Parent to Ian, forever age 16

Maurine Molak  
Parent to David, forever age 16

Amy Neville  
Parent to Alexander, forever age 14

Bridgette Norring  
Parent to Devin, forever age 19

Jodi O'Dell  
Parent to Justin, forever age 18

Monica Ortiz  
Parent of Fidel, forever age 16

Michael Ourand  
Parent to Kevin, forever age 20

Georgia Peterson  
Parent to Gregg, forever age 19

Mary Popolizio  
Parent to Alexandra-Victoria, forever age 18

Erin Popolo  
Parent to Emily, forever age 17

Kristie Reilly  
Parent to Noah, forever age 13

Bradley Richardson  
Parent to Tyler, forever age 19

Shannon Rickson  
Parent to Madison

Toney and Brandy Roberts  
Parents to Englyn, forever age 14

Mary Rodee  
Parent to Riley, forever age 15

Tammy Rodriguez  
Parent to Selena, forever age 11

Judith Rogg  
Parent to Erik, forever age 12

Deb Schmill  
Parent to Becca, forever age 18

Avery Ryan Schott  
Parent to Anna, forever age 18

Lori A. Schott  
Parent to Annalee, forever age 18

Brittney Shealy  
Parent to Keirstyn, forever age 18

Andrea Silvano  
Parent to Zachary, forever age 21

Maggie Taylor  
Parent to Emily, forever age 17

Lindsey Thurman  
Parent to Manuel (Manny), forever age 17

Diana Trujillo  
Parent to Juan, forever age 16

April Tsosie  
Parent to Melissa, forever age 16

Jeff Van Lith  
Parent to Ethan, forever age 13

Christopher Wagner  
Parent to Christopher

Krislynn Wells  
Parent to Chandler, forever age 18

Jessica Williams  
Parent to Z.B.

Kathryn Williams  
Parent to Chantel, forever age 18

Sharon Winkler  
Parent to Alexander, forever age 17

Karen Zients  
Parent to Ian, forever age 16