

June 12, 2023

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

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chairwoman, Senate Commerce Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member, Senate Commerce
Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

We are writing to urge you to bring up the bipartisan Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act (S. 1418), known as COPPA 2.0, in the Senate Commerce Committee as quickly as possible to follow that with a vote on the Senate floor this year. America's children and families have waited too long already for stronger data privacy protections.

COPPA 2.0 makes needed changes to the now 25-year-old law to protect kids and teens on the internet as it looks today. For example, it would expand protections to teens under 17 years old, limit the amount of data companies can collect from kids and teens, and ban targeted advertising to all covered minors.

As you know, COPPA 2.0 passed out of the Commerce Committee in 2022 and was recently reintroduced. This bill presents you with a significant opportunity to stand up for children and families who are experiencing serious harms from the way their online data is collected and used by private companies. This bill would cut off access to the troves of data that companies hold on children and teens and that they use to target and manipulate them, for profit, often to the detriment of their mental health and well-being.

It is now well documented that our nation's youth are suffering from a mental health crisis. The research is startling. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently found that in 2021, [1 in 10 high school girls](#) contemplated suicide. In addition, [42 percent of high school students](#) experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. While there are a number of factors behind this mental health crisis, it has become abundantly clear that young people's interactions with online technology is one significant contributor.

Passing stronger data privacy protections for minors is an essential step, perhaps the most important step, toward making the internet healthier and safer for young users. Tech companies' data practices play a significant role in how online platforms negatively impact youth mental health and well-being. Online platforms have become so powerful because of the troves of data they amass on kids and teens. Companies then use this data to serve up algorithmic recommendations, which amplify harmful content, including posts promoting eating disorders, self-harm, and dangerous physical challenges. For example,

when a teenager follows one account on healthy eating, the algorithm can drag that teen down a rabbit hole of recommendations that quickly escalates into content teaching girls how to lose weight fast and engage in disordered eating. However, without all this data, companies would not be able to target young individuals with such extreme precision, which keeps them glued to their screens and continually engaging with the platform.

In addition to strengthening privacy protections for youth, there are other important steps Congress should take to make the internet healthier and safer for young users and their families. For example, Congress should also require companies to design their platforms with young people's health and well-being in mind by passing legislation like the Kids Online Safety Act (S. 1409).

Harms to children and youth online are undeniable, and the 117th Congress devoted considerable time, thought, and energy on this issue. It would be irresponsible now for Congress to go another year without taking concrete action to protect kids online. It is time to secure a major win for our kids and their families and we strongly urge you to quickly move on COPPA 2.0.

Thank you again for your focus on online harms to kids and teens and for your ongoing attention to this critical matter. We look forward to being able to discuss this further with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Common Sense Media

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Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance

Amanda Birkhead Nutrition Counseling LLC

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Federation of Teachers

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

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Centerstone

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

Children Now

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