



June 2, 2023

The Honorable Clay Schexnayder, Speaker
House of Representatives
Louisiana State Capitol
P.O. Box 94062
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: OPPOSE: SB 162 (McCath): Secure Online Child Interaction and Age Limitation Act

Dear Speaker Schexnayder & members of the House:

On behalf of the Chamber of Progress, a tech industry coalition promoting technology's progressive future, I write to urge you to **oppose SB 162**. While we support the bill's attempt to protect children from potential harm online, SB 162 undercuts its own goals by sacrificing every social media user's privacy and dismantling many of the protections currently in place for kids online.

Our organization works to ensure that all Americans benefit from technological leaps. One of our top priorities is creating safe, healthy, and accessible online communities.

1. Many online platforms are working to make their services safer and healthier for children online.

We agree that protecting young people online is an important goal. In recent years, many platforms have heard the concerns from parents and researchers and have implemented new features to protect younger users. These new features include limiting notifications at night, restricting messaging from advertisers, and increasing protections for content uploaded by children.¹

For example, YouTube Kids, a parentally-supervised, curated experience for younger kids, uses a combination of algorithms and manual curation to show only kid-friendly videos.² In 2021, Instagram announced that it would be stricter about what types of content it recommends to 13 to 18 year olds – and rolled out new settings that give teens and parents more control over potentially upsetting content.³

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/technology/apps-child-protection.html>

² https://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_us/kids/safer-experience

³ <https://about.instagram.com/community/parents#guide>

2. Studies have shown that social media can be a positive factor in children's lives.

A recent Pew study found that majorities of teens say social media provides them with a space for connection, creativity and support.⁴ The study surveyed teens between the ages of 13 to 17. According to this study, when asked about the overall impact of social media on them personally, more teens said its effect has been mostly positive (32%) than say it has been mostly negative (9%). In fact, many of these respondents cited developing deeper friendships and connections as reasons why.

Social media, as a tool, is also how younger users collaborate on school projects or capture field trip memories.⁵ In a world where media is mainly shared online and learning how to responsibly interact with others in a digital space is a requisite for engagement in society, more teachers have begun to incorporate social media tools in their classrooms to create relevant lessons.

3. This bill would sacrifice all users' privacy in the name of increased security for children.

SB 162 would require covered social media companies to verify all users' ages beginning in 2024.⁶ The bill would require anyone with a social media account created before 2024 to submit proof of their identity, including adult users who created their accounts after turning 16.

The age verification requirement would result in social media companies extracting even more data about their users. There is disagreement about the best methods for verifying users' ages, but they could include techniques like facial recognition or other biometric scans. Even less-invasive methods like what §1752(C)(3)(b) requires, a "valid identification card issued by a government entity," would still require widespread data collection. These techniques would have to be used for every user, resulting in increased data collection for every Louisiana resident on the internet.

Age verification would be particularly harmful for anyone looking to browse anonymously. Journalists, whistleblowers, and anyone looking to participate in online discussions would be forced to disclose personal details to continue to access existing profiles. This would limit free expression for groups who need it most.

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https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/11/16/connection-creativity-and-drama-teen-life-on-social-media-in-2022/pi_2022-11-16_teens-and-social-media_0-01

⁵<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/guidebook-social-media-in-classroom-vicki-davis>

⁶ <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1309683>

This bill's age verification requirements would result in more surveillance of users and more data collection in the pursuit of increased security for children.

Additionally, a 2021 study of popular social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok found that it is easy for children to bypass any age verification systems by simply lying.⁷ The study found that children could circumvent even the most advanced methods of age verification. For example, if speech recognition were a requirement to verify one's age before opening a social media account, kids could simply play a recording of someone else's voice.

4. The bill's prohibition against targeted content would eliminate many protections in place today.

By prohibiting "the use of targeted or suggested groups, products, services, posts, accounts, or users" for users under 16, SB 162 would force platforms to dismantle many of their child-friendly products and services. YouTube Kids, for example, targets younger users with age-appropriate posts and accounts, creating a safer environment for kids to explore. Platforms use targeting and suggestions to direct users searching for harmful information such as eating disorders, illegal drugs, and suicide and redirects users to positive third-party content that can provide help, including hotlines, support communities, or educational materials. For example, Instagram not only bans posts encouraging eating disorders, last year it also started steering teens who are searching for disordered eating topics towards helpful support resources.

Prohibiting platforms from targeting users with content or making suggestions would make it harder for platforms to keep kids safe online.

For these reasons we urge you to oppose SB 162.

Respectfully,



Kouri Marshall

Director, State and Local Government Relations for Central US
Chamber of Progress

⁷ <https://studyfinds.org/kids-bypass-restrictions-social-media/>