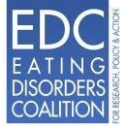




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Mental Health America

November 8, 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

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell,

On behalf of the over 215 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 to the U.S Senate floor for a vote by the end of the year.**

As you know, the bipartisan legislation passed out of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation *unanimously* on July 27, 2023 and currently has 48 co-sponsors. With this bipartisan legislation, Congress has the potential to significantly improve young people's wellbeing by transforming the digital environment for children and teens.

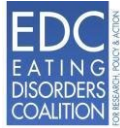
Overall, youth have been faced with a growing mental health crisis in recent years. For instance, [depression rates](#) for teens doubled between 2009 and 2019. This is happening at a time when suicide is the [second leading cause of death](#) for U.S. youth, with [one in five teens](#) considering suicide 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 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.



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- 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, sexual 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 117<sup>th</sup> 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.

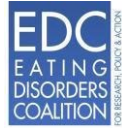
We thank you for your attention to this issue and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,

Academy for Eating Disorders



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Accanto Health

Accountable Tech

Active Minds

Ai Pono Hawaii

Alabama Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance

Alexander Neville Foundation

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association for the Child's Right to Play

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Counseling Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Arizona Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Association For Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

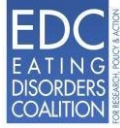
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies

Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents [ALAS]

BALANCE eating disorder treatment center



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Banu Foundation

Be Real USA

Becca Schmill Foundation Berkeley

Media Studies Group Body Activists

California, American Academy of Pediatrics – Chapter 1

California, American Academy of Pediatrics – Chapter 2

California, American Academy of Pediatrics – Chapter 3

Carly Ryan Foundation

Carolina Resource Center for Eating Disorders

Center for Change

Center for Digital Democracy

Center for Discovery Eating Disorders Treatment

Center for Humane Technology

Center for Intuitive Eating

Center for Online Safety

Chasing Hope Foundation

ChildFund International

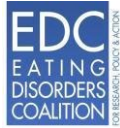
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development

Citizens for Decency



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Clementine Programs

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Colorado Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Common Sense Media

Consumer Action

Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology

D.C. Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Defending the Early Years

David's Legacy Foundation

Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Design It For Us

Devin J. Norring Foundation

Discovery Mood & Anxiety Program

Disordered Eating Center of Charleston- Charleston, West Virginia

Early Childhood Work Group, Screen Time Action Network at Fairplay

Eating Disorder Coalition of Iowa

Eating Disorder Foundation

Eating Disorder Resource Center

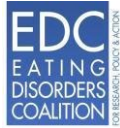
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action

Eating Disorders New Hampshire

Eating Disorders Resource Center of Silicon Valley



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EDGE Consulting Partners

EDRCSV

Emily Program

Enough Is Enough

Equip Health

Erik's Cause

Fairplay

Farrington Specialty Centers

Florida Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

For You

From Love

Galen Hope

Georgia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Global Hope 365

Idaho Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

IFEDD, The International Federation of Eating Disorder Dietitians

Illinois Certified Recovery Support Specialist

Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Indiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics



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International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses

Iowa Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Issue One

Josselyn

Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco,  
the Peninsula, Marin, and Sonoma Counties

Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Kentucky Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Kentucky Eating Disorder Council

Kentucky Voices for Health

LiveMore ScreenLess

Lookup.live

Louisiana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Lynn's Warriors

Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Massachusetts PTA

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

McCallum Place Eating Disorder Centers



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Media Education Foundation

Mental Health America

Mental Health America of Arizona

Mental Health America of Augusta

Mental Health America of Greater Dallas

Mental Health America of Greater Houston

Mental Health America of Hawaii

Mental Health America of Hendricks County

Mental Health America of Illinois

Mental Health America of Kentucky

Mental Health America of West Central Indiana, Inc.

Mental Health Association of Monmouth County

Mental Health Association of South Mississippi

Mental Health Minnesota

Mental Health Summit

Mental Health Work Group, Screen Time Action Network at Fairplay

Michigan Eating Disorders Alliance

Mississippi Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Missouri Eating Disorders Association

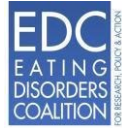
Missouri Eating Disorders Council

Monte Nido and Affiliates





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Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association, Inc (MEDA)

NAMI Barrington Area

NAMI CCNS

NAMI Champaign

NAMI Lexington

NAMI South Suburbs

NAMI Will-Grundy

National Alliance for Eating Disorders

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of Social Workers

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders

National Center on Sexual Exploitation

National Eating Disorders Association

National Education Association

National Federation of Families

National League for Nursing

Nebraska Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics



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New York State, American Academy of Pediatrics – Chapter 3

North Dakota Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

North Carolina Pediatric Society

NoSo November

Nova Luna Center

Odyssey Eating Disorder Network

Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Oklahoma Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Oliver-Pyatt Centers

Online Harms Prevention Work Group, Screen Time Action Network at Fairplay

Opal: Food+Body Wisdom

Orange County Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

PACT

Parents Television and Media Council

Parents Who Fight

ParentsTogether Action

Paving the Way Foundation

Pennsylvania Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Policy Initiatives Institute

Porn Free Colorado

Postpartum Support International

Project HEAL



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Project STAND

Prosperity Eating Disorders and Wellness

Protect Young Eyes

Public Citizen Realized

Potential Inc

REDC Consortium

Renfrew Center

RI International

Rosewood Center for Eating Disorders

Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health

Sandy Hook Promise

Screens in Schools Work Group, Screen Time Action Network at Fairplay

SEA WAVES, Inc

Society for Digital Mental Health

Society for Research in Psychopathology

Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, Division 53

Stop Predatory Gambling and the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids

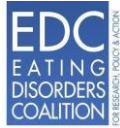
Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

Student Data Privacy Project

SunCloud Health



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The Kennedy Forum

Therapy for Black Kids

TMS Consulting, PC

Twig & Thread Consulting

Utah Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Veritas Collaborative

Vermont Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Victus Counseling & Nutrition Services

Vote For Freedom

Walden Eating Disorders Treatment

Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America

Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Washington Nature Preschool Association (WaNPA)

Washington University School of Medicine Center for Healthy Weight and Wellness

Wealth Management Ministries-Prevention Works Joint Task Force and Coalition West

Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Western New York Comprehensive Care Center for Eating Disorders

Will County Health Department

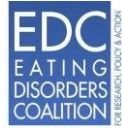
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YCA Human Trafficking Task Force