



ParentsTogether



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November 2, 2022

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell:

We represent a broad array of diverse constituencies, but we are all firmly aligned that it is past time to act urgently to safeguard our children online. **We urge you to publicly commit to moving KOSA, (S.3663) as part of the omnibus spending bill before the end of the current session and request your time to talk to parents about this important legislative priority, even in the midst of your busy calendar.**

Social media companies have made it abundantly clear that they prioritize their revenue and profits over the public interest and will not act on their own. Self-regulation has failed, and we need a new set of rules to protect our children online. In your influential position as Chair of the Senate Commerce Committee which unanimously advanced this landmark legislation out of markup, you are the leader we need on our side to advance KOSA to a vote and help us protect children and teens.

Social media are highly addictive products used by more than 90% of American [children](#). Repeated and prolonged use of social media platforms by young people is shown to increase depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, and expose children to harassment, bullying, sexual predators and drugs.

Despite knowing their products contribute to depression and suicide, social media and tech companies continue to make reprehensible product design choices that hurt children. Research leaked from Facebook/Meta found [32% of teen girls](#) said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse. In one internal poll, [13% of teen boys](#) blamed Instagram for contributing to suicidal ideations.

Like any community, online platforms attract dangerous actors with their own agendas—and children are particularly vulnerable. Often the companies themselves ignore, or even foster and encourage, online behaviors that are dangerous for children and teens because their revenue is at stake. It is estimated that online advertising firms hold [72 million data points](#) on the average child by the time they reach the age of 13, allowing marketers to target young people's vulnerabilities with extreme precision. Researchers have demonstrated that it is possible to target [ads to teenagers](#) on Instagram based on their interests in dieting, alcohol, and gambling.

It's not just Facebook or the impending Metaverse. TikTok is designed for continuous engagement with a never-ending, personalized playlist. According to scientists, the app's design is intentionally addictive to serve a user more of the content they engage with, no matter what that content is or how old the user is, so they are served more ads. For example, if a teen is engaging with content that promotes unhealthy diet and



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weight loss practices, she is going to be served more of that material. Teen hospitalizations for eating disorders have [doubled](#) since 2020, a statistic the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention links in part to increased social media use.

Snapchat has become a hotbed of teen deaths by fentanyl poisoning because young users are buying laced drugs from adult strangers. Further, there's been an explosion of child sexual exploitation across platforms. According to the [Internet Watch Foundation](#), there was a 3x increase in online sexual exploitation of 7-10 year olds in 2021 over the previous year.

As a bill with broad bipartisan support, KOSA is our best chance at passing robust online safety legislation this year as part of an omnibus spending bill. It is strong legislation that would go a long way towards creating the Internet children and families deserve. KOSA is designed to give families tools they need to protect against threats to their children's health and wellbeing online. It would require platforms to help put children's safety first; help parents and their children protect private information; and make it easier for parents and children to report dangerous online activity, disable addictive features, and opt out of algorithmic recommendations. Additionally, KOSA requires platforms to track and monitor risks to minors and make public the steps they are taking to mitigate them. All of these provisions will help make social media a safer place for everyone—but especially for children and teens.

For years our children have been harmed, and even died as a result of social media malfeasance. Big Tech intimately knows the harm they cause and have not only failed to regulate themselves but have actively hidden the critical information on how their products devastate children. We need action now. We urge you to publicly commit to moving KOSA in the omnibus spending bill and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience. Please contact your constituent, Lisa Honold at the Center for Online Safety at lisa@centerforonlinesafety.com or (206) 779-0663 to schedule a meeting.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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Laura Bay, Board Member, Mental Health America

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Langley, Washington

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