September 12, 2022

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Ranking Member  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers,

On behalf of the undersigned national, state, and local organizations we are writing to urge you in your leadership capacity to introduce and advance a U.S. House of Representatives companion bill of the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act (S. 3663) this fall. As you know, the bipartisan legislation passed the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation unanimously in July and 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. 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 has helped exacerbate these trends. Over the last two years, the pandemic has also caused youth to spend more time than ever online. 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.

After numerous hearings held by the U.S. House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce and the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security, and abundant research findings, the evidence is clear of the potential severe impacts 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.
  - Meta derives an estimated $230 million annually from pro-eating disorder accounts.

- Fifty-nine percent of U.S. teens have reported 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. Research on associations between social media use is emerging. There are data to suggest possible developmental benefits from online social interaction. (Daine et al., 2013), however, several distinct lines of inquiry also suggest pathways that link social media use to maladaptive outcomes, including engagement in risk behavior, psychological symptoms, illegal behavior, and aberrant brain development (De-Sola Gutiérrez et al., 2016; Griffiths et al., 2014; Kirby et al., 2020).

Young users are simply less able to resist temptations to remain online (Ang & Lee, 2017; Somerville & Casey, 2010) as full brain maturation typically does not occur until age 25, which leaves children and youth to dozens of potential years of unregulated social media use.

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 (Epps-Darling et al., 2020; Bravo et al., 2019). 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.

As the Chairman and Ranking Member, you both have the power to contribute to tackling this growing issue through advancing the Kids Online Safety Act, 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,

#HalfTheStory

3Strands Global Foundation

A Safe Place

A&K Ranch Ministries, LLC

Academy for Eating Disorders

Active Minds

Amanda Birkhead Nutrition Counseling LLC

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychological Association
ANAD
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bay Area Nutrition, LLC
Association of Children’s Residential & Community Services
Banu Foundation
Becca Schmill Foundation
Berkeley Media Studies Group
Call to Freedom, Inc.
Carolina Resource Center for Eating Disorders
Center for Digital Democracy
Center for Intuitive Eating
Center for Online Safety
Changing Destinies Ministry
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
ChildFund International
Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development
Clinical Social Work Association
Coalition for the Advancement and Application of Psychological Science (CAAPS) Executive Committee
Common Sense Media
Community Care Network
Consumer Action
Consumer Federation of America
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Culture Reframed
Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited (DA:NCE)
Defend Young Minds
Disability Connection
Eating Disorder Coalition of Iowa
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Eating Disorders Resource Center
EDRD Pro LLC
El Pueblo
Empower Wellness, Inc.
End Sexual Exploitation Montana
Enough Is Enough
Exposure Labs, The Creators of The Social Dilemma
Fairplay
Families as Allies
Friends of the Earth
Florida Gulf Coast University
Free NOLA, Inc.
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Global Hope 365
Holistic Moms Network
Hoops Care LLC
Inseparable
Innocents at Risk

Integrative Life Network

International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses

Jubilee Havens

Justice Resource Institute

LookUp

Lynn Meadows Discovery Center Summer Camp

Lynn's Warriors

Marsh Law Firm PLLC

Massachusetts PTA

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mental Health America

Mental Health America of West Central Indiana

Mental Health Association of South Mississippi

Mentari

Mississippi Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics

Mom Congress

Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association (MEDA)

MS Harm Reduction Initiative

My Life My Choice

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Alliance on Mental Illness—Pierce County

National Alliance for Eating Disorders

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
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 League for Nursing
National Organization for Women
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Nutrition 4 You, LLC
New Englanders Against Sexual Exploitation
Nurses United Against Human Trafficking, Pennsylvania
Oasis Mental Wellness, LLC
Opal: Food + Body Wisdom
Padres Presentes Program
Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women’s Association
Parents Against Child Sex Abuse/KIDS TOO Movement
Parents Television and Media Council
Parents Who Fight
ParentsTogether
Paving the Way Foundation
Peace Educators Allied for Children Everywhere, Inc.
Pinkmantaray LLC
Postpartum Support International
Project HEAL
Project Maria
Protect Young Eyes
Public Good Law Center
RAINN
Ravenhawk Recovery LLC
REDC Consortium
Realized Potential Inc.
Reflective Spaces Ministries
Resiliency Foundation
RI International, Inc.
Rivers of Justice
Roots Nutrition, FLG
Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance
SMART Recovery
She Has A Name
South Carolina Legislative Roundtable
Southwest Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking
State Guides Wilderness
Stop Predatory Gambling and the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids
Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders (STRIPED)
SunCloud Health
The American Association for Promoting the Child's Right to Play, IPAUSA.org
The American Association for Promoting the Child's Right to Play, the USA affiliate of the International Play Association. IPA USA
The Avery Center
The Carly Ryan Foundation
The Emily Program
The Jed Foundation
The Kennedy Forum
The Mental Health Strategic Impact Initiative (S2i)
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Tech Oversight Project
The Stop Trafficking Project
Traffick911
Twig & Thread Consulting
U.S. PIRG
UltraViolet Action
UNICEF USA
Washington Association for the Education of Young
Children
Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Washington Nature Preschool Association
We Stand Guard LLC
Wired Human
YourMomCares