



EDC Applauds U.S. Senate Commerce Committee Passage of Landmark Legislation to Protect Kids Online

WASHINGTON D.C. (July 27, 2022)- Today, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee passed the *Kids Online Safety Act* ([S.3663](#)) (*KOSA*), led by Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and the *Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act* ([S.1628](#)) (*COPPA 2.0*), led by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA). *KOSA* passed unanimously, 28-0, out of committee. The two pieces of legislation now await a vote on the U.S. Senate floor. The two bipartisan bills have the potential to significantly improve young people's wellbeing by transforming the digital environment for children and teens. The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) would like to thank the Senators leading these bills, the Senate Commerce Committee members who voted in favor of its passage, and the organizations that worked tirelessly with the EDC to push these bills forward including Fairplay, Common Sense, Mental Health America, and the American Psychological Association. The EDC also gives gratitude to all its members, ambassadors, and advocates for their passion and dedication to help pass *KOSA* and *COPPA 2.0* through committee.

Together, *KOSA* and *COPPA 2.0* will prevent online platforms from exploiting young users' developmental vulnerabilities and targeting them in unfair and harmful ways. *KOSA* 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, online bullying, gambling, and narcotics. *COPPA 2.0* would expand privacy protections to teens for the first time, establishing a "Digital Marketing Bill of Rights for Teens" that limits the collection of personal information. The bill would also expand protections for children under 13, including banning surveillance advertising, and preventing companies from turning a blind eye towards millions of young users on their sites.

"If we have learned anything over the past year since the whistleblower hearings in Congress, it is that social media platforms will not solve this very serious social problem on their own," **said S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Past President, Eating Disorders Coalition, and Director, Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders.** "Their business model, which has proven itself to be exquisitely profitable, is self-reinforcing for investors and top management, as they generate billions of dollars each year in ad revenue from children on their platforms. The industry has for many years aggressively guarded the secrecy of its predatory algorithms, keeping them out of reach and spared from scrutiny by the public, researchers, and government."

“We have been saying for a while now that children need both better privacy protections, including privacy protections for teens for the first time, and they need to be protected against manipulative and harmful design that keeps them online too long and exposes them to harmful content, so these bills really work well together,” **said Josh Golin, Executive Director of Fairplay.**

Youth today are facing a mental health crisis, and the growing use of social media platforms designed in ways that increase exposure to harmful content, undermine privacy, and encourage unhealthy patterns has exacerbated the harm on youth’s mental health. Fifty-nine percent of U.S. teens have reported being bullied on social media¹, an experience linked to increased risky behaviors such as smoking and increased risk of suicidal ideation.

"Mental Health America (MHA) commends the members of the Senate Commerce Committee for advancing KOSA and COPPA 2.0," **said Mary Giliberti, Chief Policy Officer at MHA.** "These pieces of legislation would hold social media companies accountable and serve as a first step to addressing the role of social media in our current youth mental health crisis. We urge the full Senate to vote yes on these bills and for the House to move forward to enact these important reforms."

It is estimated that online advertising firms hold 72 million data points on the average child² 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.³ Instagram alone includes 90,000 unique pro-eating disorders accounts with a reach of 20 million followers and derives an estimated \$230 million annually from pro-eating disorder accounts.⁴

“Growing up with an influx of social media has been devastating for my mental health,” **said Brooke Schwartz, EDC Ambassador.** “Diet culture is so ingrained in our culture and the longer we spend flaunting and daunting over posts, the more targeted advertisements we get for diet products and “thinspo.” What do we value more, capitalism or the lives of future generations to come?”

"The EDC is encouraged by the overwhelming show of support from the committee members for this vital legislation,” **added S. Bryn Austin.** "The unanimous vote sends a strong signal to parents, kids and community advocates that their voices have been heard. The EDC and all its advocates will keep fighting for common-sense oversight and protections on social media till the job is done."

¹ Pew Research Center. “A Majority of Teens have Experienced Some Form of Cyberbullying.” 2018.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/09/27/a-majority-of-teens-have-experienced-some-form-of-cyberbullying/>.

² McCann, Duncan. I-SPY: The Billion Dollar Business of Surveillance Advertising to Kids. New Economics Foundation. 2021.

https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/i-Spy_NEF.pdf.

³ Tech Transparency Project. Pills, Cocktails, and Anorexia: Facebook Allows Harmful Ads to Target Teens. 2021.

<https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/pills-cocktails-and-anorexia-facebook-allows-harmful-ads-target-teens>.

⁴ Fairplay for Kids. Designing for Disorder: Instagram’s Pro-eating Disorder Bubble. 2022. https://fairplayforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/designing_for_disorder.pdf.

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a federal advocacy organization based in Washington, DC. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can be found at eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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