FACT SHEET **Social Media Accountability**

California Social Media Platform Liability Bill

Legislation relating to enhanced penalties for social media platforms' negligence – SPONSOR

AB 2, Authored by CA Assemblymember Lowenthal, and sponsored by Common Sense Media and others.

UPDATE: Signed into law by Governor Newsom on September 10, 2026; effective January 1, 2027.

What does AB 2 do? This bill protects California's kids and teens online by providing enhanced financial penalties against large social media companies that are found liable in court for offering platform features that resulted in harm or injury to minors through those companies' own negligence.

Why is AB 2 necessary? Social media platform features contribute to harms experienced by kids and teens, including mental health and physical harms, both intentionally and by neglect. Researchers and clinicians have attributed a significant correlation between social media platforms and worsening children's mental health for years.

Now, thanks to the social media addiction lawsuits, we have internal documentation from the companies revealing the companies knowledge of harms. For example:

- Meta has known for years that cosmetic "filters" and "effects," which are common features of Instagram and its visual camera, harm young users.
- TikTok received countless reports from users and parents describing TikTok as "addictive," "like crystal meth," and "ruining" children's attention and sleep.

YouTube research had shown that teens were more susceptible to online harms because "changes in brain development predisposes young teens to act more impulsively, show a greater tendency towards risk taking, and lead to an increased interest in riskier content."

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Social media companies' business model depends on keeping kids and teens engaged for as long as possible, since more time spent on the platform means more advertising revenue. According to the former U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, this excessive engagement has contributed to significantly higher rates of youth depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and self-harm. But in addition to platforms' intentional design features that are known to hurt kids, all companies are responsible for harms to kids, even unintentional harms, under California law.

AB 2 holds companies accountable not only for harms that the companies knew about but also harms that occur through their own negligence and will serve as an incentive to change design features to prioritize child safety. Companies will have stronger financial incentive to integrate choices like age-appropriate default safeguards, easily accessible mental health resources, time management tools, and more.

What are platforms' obligations under AB 2? Under existing California negligence law, Civil Code section 1714, all platforms, including social media companies, are financially responsible for harm caused by negligence. AB 2 ensures platforms exercise ordinary care and skill by adding statutory damages against companies found liable for harm to minors for their harmful design. This includes a set amount of $5,000 per violation up to a maximum of $1M per child, or three times the amount of the child's actual damages, whichever is applicable. This means the

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companies can no longer treat harms they cause to kids as a cost of doing business. Using the social media addiction case of K.G.M. as an example, K.G.M. was awarded $6M by the jury, but under AB 2 she would have received $12M.

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