



**Common Sense Media Supports the
Massachusetts Act Protecting Children From Addictive Social Media Feeds
([S.30](#) and [H.4229](#))**

Common Sense Media supports the Massachusetts Act Protecting Children From Addictive Social Media Feeds (S.30 and H.4229). This Act would protect Massachusetts children's and teens' mental health and well-being, including improving their sleep, by limiting social media companies' use of addictive feeds and disruptive notifications.

Common Sense Media, a national non-profit organization, is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the digital era. Our ratings, research, and resources reach more than 150 million users worldwide and 1.4 million educators every year. In Massachusetts alone, more than 18,000 teachers have registered to teach Common Sense's digital citizenship and literacy materials to their students in over 1,900 schools in the state.

Risks Abound for Kids Online

Kids' internet usage is at an all-time high. According to the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 advisory, Social Media and Youth Mental Health, up to 95% of youth ages 13-17 report using social media, with more than a third saying they use social media "almost constantly." Our research has shown teens spend an average of 4.5 hours per day on their phones, with about a quarter of them spending as much as 5 to 8 hours in front of their screens every day. Our report also revealed that kids and teens struggle to set their own boundaries when it comes to managing notifications from apps on their smartphones. Teens connect through social media platforms at higher rates than any other group. They also report that these platforms form a larger part of their social life than any other group. Once they start using these technologies, they have outsized levels of difficulty stopping. Younger children, such as those aged 11-12, may spend less time online unsupervised, but they too face the same age-inappropriate exposure risks on social media platforms as older children—exposures that can have a significant impact on them.

Common Sense Media's research on girls and social media use reveals that, despite many girls' positive perceptions of social media's overall impact on their lives, a significant proportion of girls report challenges in regulating their use. This research also shows that numerous social media design features, such as algorithmic video recommendations, endless scrolling, constant notifications, and autoplay, can make these platforms difficult to stop using. Additionally, throughout this research, it is clear that although social media can play a critical role in girls' mental health, this role is not always a good one. According to the girls we studied, social media

can provide access to “information and resources, social connection, self-expression, and identity affirmation.” But, at the same time, these girls also identified many risks of social media use, including “exposure to harmful content, bullying and drama, unwanted contact by strangers, negative social comparisons, and interference with sleep.”

Social media companies intentionally use manipulative design features to increase kids' online engagement in order to generate more revenue from advertising. These companies process enormous amounts of data about users' behavior, using millions of user data points to filter information through sophisticated algorithms to create social media feeds personalized to each user. These personalized and addictive social media feeds keep kids glued to their devices. Repeat notifications (or ‘nudging’) pull youth back into apps and extend their attention and time online. Indeed, our research shows that popular social media apps, like TikTok, provide low-friction access to infinite, personalized content, which short-circuits kids' and teens' attention and drives compulsive engagement. Furthermore, research found that nighttime social media use can negatively impact sleep and be particularly harmful to children's health. Pursuit of higher company profits is to blame. Platforms create these features to promote user engagement and increase ad revenue, regardless of the negative consequences.

Business models built around maximizing users' time spent online enable harm to many of our kids and teens. The public, as well as teenagers, are increasingly aware of these harmful social media practices. Research released by Common Sense Media earlier this year revealed widespread distrust of major technology companies among teens. Over half of teens surveyed report that they do not trust tech companies to make ethical and responsible design decisions (53%) or to prioritize user safety over profits (62%). Polling also shows that parents of all political backgrounds support establishing guardrails to protect kids online - guardrails that do not exist today for Massachusetts's kids and teens. But it is also clear that kids, teens, and their parents are outmatched when it comes to fighting back against powerful addictive and manipulative design features.

Common Sense Media Supports the Massachusetts Act Protecting Children From Addictive Social Media Feeds

The Massachusetts Act Protecting Children From Addictive Social Media Feeds is essential to enhance online safety for Massachusetts' children and families. The Act protects kids and teens from the harms tied to addictive features on social media platforms while preserving their ability to use the internet to learn, explore, and find community. This Act protects kids online by limiting social media companies' ability to use addictive feeds that subvert user autonomy and keep kids glued to their devices, and preventing companies from waking kids at all hours of the night with notifications and pings.

First, the Act requires an operator who provides an addictive social media platform to prohibit addictive feeds to a covered user until the operator has determined that the covered user is not a minor. This language is critical: it means that an operator must provide a non-addictive feed experience to all users - by default - until they determine a user isn't a minor. The Act further specifies that covered operators must use 'commercially reasonable and technically feasible age determination methods' to obtain actual knowledge that a covered user is not a covered minor. Otherwise, operators must operate under the presumption that a user is a covered minor. Therefore, under this Act, all users will receive the less addictive form of the platform (a feed that only contains information sought by the user and not pushed upon the user by an algorithm) by default until the platform determines the user is not a minor.

Second, the Act requires an operator who provides an addictive social media platform to not allow notifications to a covered user between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., unless the operator has determined the covered user is not a minor. Again, the language is critical here: requiring no notifications - by default - to users of the addictive social media platform from 12:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. until the platform determines the user is not a minor is really important. These 6 hours are when a covered user - but really most users - are trying to sleep, and these notifications only hinder this attempt. By requiring this as a default setting, all users of the addictive social media platform will benefit from these limited notifications for 6 hours a night. At least until the addictive social media platform determines - using 'commercially reasonable and technically feasible age determination methods' - that the user is not a minor.

Notably, although industry has claimed the Act would require privacy-invasive age assurance and would block access to content, these are false claims. This Act does not require the blocking of any content at all. In the Act, there is an exception for content when "the user expressly and unambiguously requested the specific media." This Act actually elevates the content the user is seeking by eliminating platform-pushed content that the user is not seeking.

Furthermore, industry is claiming that instead of giving teenagers a healthier online experience, the Act could prevent platforms from ensuring age-appropriate feeds for teens. They claim that the Act could mean that whoever posts most recently goes to the top of a teen's feed - even if that post is spam, hate speech, or other harmful content. However, the Act actually gives teenagers a healthier online experience by elevating content the minor user is actually seeking. Also, nothing in the Act prevents the platforms from using an algorithm to filter out spam, hate speech, or other harmful content. Currently, with all of the targeted advertising and content that an algorithm determines a user should see, feeds are loaded with content that the user didn't actually choose. Social media companies use these addictive feeds to get kids and teens to view and engage with platforms longer to make larger profits.

Finally, although industry has claimed the Act could endanger privacy by putting personal data at risk due to privacy-invasive age assurance requirements, again, this is not an accurate claim. The Act requires that operators of an addictive social media platform use “commercially reasonable methods to determine that the covered user is not a covered minor.” There are a number of ways that platforms can, and already do, conduct age assurance of their users through their millions of user collected data points.

Ultimately, this Act would protect Massachusetts children’s and teens’ mental health and well-being, including improving their sleep, by limiting social media companies’ use of addictive feeds and disruptive notifications. The Bay State would be in good company if it passed this Act as both New York and California took similar steps in 2024. In the absence of federal action to safeguard children online, it is critical that Massachusetts join other states in passing this legislation.

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