

# **The Kids Online Safety Act of 2022**

*Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) & Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)*

**The Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) empowers kids and parents to take control over kids' online experiences to better protect their health and well-being.**

## **The Problem**

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a teenage mental health crisis in America—skyrocketing suicide rates, hospitalizations for self-harm, and depression among children and teens. This decade alone, suicide and hospital admissions for self-harm have doubled among younger teen girls.

As five hearings in the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, extensive academic research, media reporting, and heartbreaking stories from families have shown, social media platforms play a role in the mental health crisis for children and teens. Social media can foster body image issues, create addiction-like patterns of use, promote products that are harmful or illegal for young audiences, and fuel destructive bullying. The vital importance of mitigating the harmful effects of social media has been made all the more urgent by the pandemic as more educational and social activities have moved online.

## **The Solution**

KOSA provides families with the tools, safeguards, and transparency they need to protect against threats to children's health and well-being online. The legislation would require social media platforms put the interests of children first by requiring platforms to make safety the default and to give kids and parents tools to help prevent the destructive impact of social media. KOSA also ensures that parents and policymakers can assess whether social media platforms are taking meaningful steps to address risks to kids. To that end, the bill:

- **Provides parents and kids safeguards and tools to protect kids' experiences online:** The bill requires social media platforms provide minors with options to protect their information, disable addictive product features, and opt-out of algorithmic recommendations—and requires platforms to enable the strongest settings by default. The bill also gives parents new controls to help support their children and spot harmful behaviors, including by providing children and parents with a dedicated channel to report harms to kids to the platform.
- **Creates accountability for social media's harms to kids:** The bill creates a duty for social media platforms to prevent and mitigate harms to minors, such as content promoting of self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, and sexual exploitation. It also requires social media platforms perform an annual independent audit assessing risks to minors, their compliance with this Act, and whether the platform is taking meaningful steps to prevent those harms.
- **Opens up black box algorithms:** The bill provides academic researchers and non-profit organizations with access to critical datasets from social media platforms to foster research regarding harms to the safety and well-being of minors.

## **Endorsements**

The Kids Online Safety Act has been endorsed by Common Sense Media, the American Psychological Association, the 5Rights Foundation, American Compass, the Internet Accountability Project, American Principles Project, and the Digital Progress Institute.