



August 20th, 2026

Chairman VanDeaver and Members
House Committee on Public Health
Texas House of Representatives

RE: Written Testimony on Social Media's Impact on Youth Health and Well-Being

Chairman VanDeaver and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the impact of social media and artificial intelligence on the health and well-being of Texas youth.

There is little doubt that social media has changed childhood. Excessive screen time, cyberbullying, online exploitation, addictive platform design, and algorithmic amplification deserve careful examination. Parents, educators, technology companies, and policymakers all have a role to play in addressing these challenges. However, legitimate concerns should not lead Texas toward policies that unnecessarily restrict constitutional rights, expand government authority over speech, or displace the role of parents. Parents must always remain the primary decision-makers for their children. Public policy should strengthen parental authority by encouraging transparency, meaningful parental controls, digital literacy, and access to information that allows families to make informed decisions. Government should be cautious about substituting its judgment for that of millions of Texas families with one-size-fits-all mandates.

Likewise, efforts to regulate social media should recognize the constitutional protections surrounding speech and expression. Courts continue to wrestle with these issues because online platforms operate at the intersection of public safety, privacy, commerce, and the First Amendment. Texas should avoid policies that require broad censorship, compel protected speech, or create unnecessary barriers to lawful expression.

Privacy should also remain a central consideration. Many proposals intended to protect children rely upon expanded identity verification or collection of sensitive personal information. Policymakers should carefully weigh whether such requirements introduce new cybersecurity and privacy risks for Texans. Policymakers should also recognize that age verification necessarily entails identity verification. A system cannot confirm a user's age without collecting, matching, or inferring identity-linked information, whether through a government-issued identification, a credit card, a biometric scan, or device-level signals. Routing that function through third-party verifiers does not eliminate the data. It concentrates it in fewer hands, creating exactly the kind of centralized repository that becomes a target for breach and a resource for subpoena.

That question is no longer hypothetical in Texas. The App Store Accountability Act took effect earlier this year following extended litigation, and it now requires age verification and parental consent for app downloads by minors. That litigation remains pending, and the Act's constitutionality has not been finally resolved. Separately, provisions of the SCOPE Act have been enjoined on First Amendment grounds. Texas therefore has direct experience with both approaches, and the Legislature is better positioned than it was three years ago to evaluate what these frameworks have actually accomplished, what sensitive information they have caused to be collected and where it is stored, and how courts have treated them. Before adopting additional mandates, the Committee should ask for that record. Evidence from laws already in force is more useful than projections about laws not yet written.

Technology companies should be held accountable when they violate the law or misrepresent the safety of their products. Existing consumer protection law already provides that authority, and the Attorney General has brought actions under it. Those cases are properly resolved by the courts on their merits, and Texas Policy Research takes no position on any pending matter. The relevant point for this Committee is that enforcement of existing law is already available, that it reaches demonstrated misconduct rather than restricting lawful users, and that it does not require new mandates to function.

As the Legislature evaluates this issue, I encourage members to pursue targeted solutions that address demonstrable harms while preserving constitutional liberties, parental authority, and individual privacy. Protecting children and protecting freedom are not mutually exclusive goals. Texas can and should do both.

Thank you for your consideration.

For Liberty, For Texas!

Jeremy D. Kitchen
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