

NATIONAL DECLARATION ON AI AND KIDS' SAFETY

May 12, 2025

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming part of our children's daily lives—from understanding their speech to powering search engines to helping with their homework. Yet, without stringent safeguards, AI interactions pose serious risks to children's safety, social, emotional, cognitive, and moral development, and overall well-being. We have seen firsthand the alarming consequences when profit-driven AI is unleashed on young users without adequate protections and pre-launch testing. The most alarming examples involve anthropomorphized AI companion bots, a type of AI product that is unsafe for minors by design:



Meta's AI chatbots on Instagram and Facebook were reported engaging users, including those potentially identifying as minors, in sexually suggestive or inappropriate conversations, with internal sources noting concerns about loosened safety filters in the push for engagement (Wall Street Journal, "Meta's 'Digital Companions' Will Talk Sex With Users—Even Children," April 26th, 2025).



Replika was flagged for serious privacy concerns and potential exposure to adult content for users (See, e.g., Mozilla Foundation, *Privacy Not Included*, Reports 2022, 2023).



Snapchat's "My AI" chatbot offered disturbing guidance to a user posing as a 13-yearold, advising on inappropriate sexual relationships and concealing physical abuse (Center for Countering Digital Hate, "AI Exposed: How My AI Puts Children At Risk", April 2023).








Character.AI allowed the creation of chatbots engaging in child sexual abuse roleplay and suicide-themed conversations, violating the company's own terms of service (Futurism, "Character. AI Promises Changes After Revelations of Pedophile and Suicide Bots on Its Service," November 14, 2024).

These documented incidents are not isolated occurrences—they illustrate a broader systemic danger where technology companies prioritize engagement metrics and profitability over children's safety, development, and wellbeing. Tech executives have been clear that these bots are designed to not only imitate social interaction, but also somehow meet a user's social needs. In order to flourish, children need responsive interaction from humans who care about them and can empathize with them – something AI can't provide. It is no exaggeration to call this a reckless race to market that directly threatens the health and well-being of our youngest generation.

Yet, technology need not be designed in an inherently dangerous way.

To prevent unnecessary harms and realize the potential for positive uses of technology, we advocate at a minimum for clear **non-negotiable** guiding principles and standards in the design and operation of all AI products aimed at children:

-  **Ban Attention-Based Design:** No AI designed for minors should profit from extending engagement through manipulative design of any sort. Manipulation includes, but is not limited to, anthropomorphic companion AI which by its nature deceives minors by seeking to meet their social needs. AI must prioritize children's well-being over profits or research.
-  **Minimal and Protected Data Collection:** Companies should collect only essential data required for safe AI operation. Children's data must never be monetized, sold or used without full and clear disclosure and parental consent in support of that usage.
-  **Full Parental Transparency:** Parents should have comprehensive visibility and control, including proactive notifications and straightforward content moderation tools.
-  **Robust Age-Appropriate Safeguards:** AI must not serve up inappropriate or harmful content, specifically content that would violate a platform's own community guidelines or Federal Law.
-  **Independent Auditing and Accountability:** AI products must undergo regular third-party audits and testing with child-development experts. Companies must swiftly address identified harms, taking full accountability. Future products should be extensively tested with minors before release instead of after.

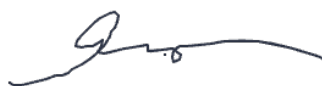
Even when such principles are applied and AI products are subject to reasonable safety testing and standards prior to launch, it is possible, even likely, that some types of AI products –as is the case with companion AI bots – will be deemed unsafe at any speed for minors.

To promulgate and enforce these basic, starting point principles effectively, we call upon Congress and the U.S. courts to clarify and reform Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. We strongly reject the industry's assertion that AI and algorithms inherently deserve immunity or are covered speech. It is time to make unequivocally clear that Section 230 protections do not apply to algorithmically-recommended or AI-created content, or a company's platform design choices. Just as a defective toy or harmful medication must face liability and be taken off shelves, AI products that harm children must also bear full product liability and be banned. As Senator Richard Blumenthal emphasized, "When these new technologies harm innocent people, the companies must be held accountable... Victims deserve their day in court" Sen. Josh Hawley emphatically stated something we all agree with: "I don't want 13 year-olds to be your guinea pig. This is what happened with social media. We had social media, who made billions of dollars giving us a mental health crisis in this country. They got rich, the kids got depressed, committed suicide. Why would we want to run that experiment again with AI?" (Statement during Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearing, "Oversight of A.I.: The Need for Regulation", September 12, 2023).

We, the undersigned, call urgently on policymakers, tech companies, and communities to join us in championing a safer, responsible, and ethical digital future for our children. Our kids deserve technology that enriches their lives, protects their innocence, and empowers their potential—not technology that exploits or endangers them.



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Heat Initiative



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Brandon Guffey
SC House District 48- Less Than 3
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Sara Siegard
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Victoria Dunckley MD
Pediatric Psychiatrist; author,
Reset Your Child's Brain



Larissa May
Halfthestory & Ginko



Erin Walker
Project Stand

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MaryAnn Michaelis Addo". The script is fluid and cursive.

MaryAnn Michaelis Addo
Recovery-Washington

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carrie Goldberg". The script is stylized and cursive.

Carrie Goldberg
C.A. Goldberg, PLLC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Cherkin". The script is cursive and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Emily Cherkin
The Screentime Consultant

“AI chatbots are sexually grooming young people, compromising their privacy, and causing our children to die by suicide all because tech CEOs like Mark Zuckerberg and Evan Spiegel care more making money than they do about protecting the lives of kids. Children are dying, but these companies just don’t care.” — Sarah Gardner, CEO of Heat Initiative

“AI is going to change everything. It can accelerate productivity and it can accelerate exploitation. Dozens of organizations across the political and ideological spectrum have come together to state a simple message: our kids must be protected from exploitative uses of AI and this can’t wait. It’s time for our leaders to listen and intervene before kids are harmed by irresponsible use of AI.” — Tim Estes, AngelQ

“No one disputes the fact that AI products have the potential to cause serious harms to vulnerable consumers. We need to put that into context ... billion-dollar corporations are distributing non-essential products to millions of American kids for “free,” despite serious and known risks of harms, with no safety testing, regulations, or even a track record of industry transparency. We already have filed suit on behalf of a child who died as the result of this recklessness and two others seriously injured, and there are more to come because these products are dangerous! Our elected representatives on both sides of the aisle must work together to fix this yesterday.” — Laura Marquez-Garrett, The Social Media Victims Law Center

“Innovation through exploitation is not the American way. We have a responsibility to ensure AI tools are designed to enrich—not endanger—our children’s lives. The difference lies in the design choices developers make and the standards policymakers enforce. This declaration offers an invaluable framework to guide us in the right direction.” — Wes Hodges, Acting Director of the Center for Technology and the Human Person, The Heritage Foundation

“It’s increasingly clear that mainstream AI tools are not being designed with safety or prevention of sexual exploitation in mind. It’s time to stop experimenting on children, and establish commonsense guardrails.” — Haley McNamara, Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives and Programs, National Center on Sexual Exploitation

“AI-powered companion chatbots, large language models, and algorithmic systems pose a growing threat to American society. They consistently expose children to self-harm content, sexual exploitation, and relentless manipulation, all with little to no accountability. Just as defective toys or dangerous medications are subject to liability and removed from the market, technology, like artificial intelligence and social media, must not be exempt from responsibility. These are some of the most powerful corporations in the world, yet they continue to operate under a separate, outdated set of rules — unlike other companies.

For too long, Big Tech has used Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act as a shield to evade any kind of legal accountability for products and design features that harm children and wreak havoc on our political system. But it doesn’t have to be this way. We can create technological tools that protect our children and strengthen and enhance American democracy, rather than fueling corporate profits at the expense of our nation’s children.” — Alix Fraser, Issue One, Vice President of Advocacy

“Kids are sucking on algorithm straws created by big tech. The disclosures students make after our BeAlert® Student Assemblies, based on “life online” reveal heartbreaking struggles with loneliness, isolation, depression, suicide, cyberbullying, sexting, sextortion, controlling relationships, and pornography. With AI it’s becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between a real pervert, predator, and pimp or one that is generated by AI. AI generated fantasies reach new levels of depravity and is creating literal devastation in the lives of students when they are online.” — Russ Tuttle, The Stop Trafficking Project®

“Without proper safeguards, these AI tools pose a very real danger to vulnerable users — and especially kids. We need lawmakers to stand up for America’s children and demand common sense regulations to hold these companies accountable for the harms they are creating. As we’ve already learned from social media, they aren’t going to stop unless we make them.” — Julie Scelfo, MAMA

“As a parent and advocate, I know the real-world consequences when technology is designed without children’s safety in mind. Without strict standards and accountability, AI becomes a risk we cannot afford. The National Declaration is a vital step toward demanding the safeguards our kids deserve. We cannot allow another generation to be exploited by profit-driven platforms that treat children as test subjects instead of human beings.” — Amy Neville, Alexander Neville Foundation

“The well-being of children is the truest measure of a society’s health. If they are not thriving, society is in decay. Section 230 has become a legal virus, shielding platforms and now AI as they algorithmically flood young minds with addictive, dehumanizing content. If we want to heal the childhood mental health crisis, we must first cure Section 230.” — Jason Frost, CEO and Co-Founder of Wired Human

“There is too much at stake to continue accepting innovation of AI at face value. This declaration is the mark of a movement away from the norms that celebrates these companies whenever they give us something new and these guidelines are a framework for accountability when that newness endangers our children.” — Ava Smithing, Young Peoples Alliance

“AI chatbots are too powerful and influential to leave unregulated. We have not provided legal standards for their development, and our children are paying the price.” — Barbara Patch, All Girls Allowed

“We lost our joyful, active child Grace to social media harms an unbelievable 13 YEARS ago and yet there still are no federal protections in place to save others. It’s unconscionable -the dangers will proliferate even more with AI and without meaningful change, more children WILL die.” — Christine McComas, Grace McComas Memorial

“We’ve already witnessed the devastating effects of social media on youth mental health when profit was prioritized over protection. The current ‘release first, fix later’ approach is completely unacceptable when our children’s safety is at stake. We cannot allow the same mistakes to be repeated with AI technologies that have even greater potential for harm if deployed recklessly. As a society, we must strive for a future where technology enriches our children’s lives rather than exploits their vulnerabilities or endangers their wellbeing.” - Shelby Knox, Director of Online Safety Campaigns, ParentsTogether Action

“Technology is never morally neutral. It’s forming souls, including the souls of our children. For their happiness, and for the happiness of the nation, our government must use the power of law to protect kids from the most insidious forms of technological power threatening to deform us.” — Chad Pecknold, The Catholic University of America

“Not only are kids being exposed to pornography in unprecedented numbers, but now they can form “relationships” with AI chatbots, decreasing any incentive for real relationships or intimacy. If we want thriving, healthy children and future adults, there must be protection from technology that hijacks the brains of our kids and makes a fantasy world much more appealing than real life.” — Heidi Olson, Paradigm Shift Training and Consulting

"What kind of society doesn't put reasonable, commonsense, default barriers between children and egregious harm? We must learn from the mistakes we made with social media and do better for our children. It's time for a framework and to swing open the courtroom doors. Not to create a flood of litigation. But to remind Big Tech that we could." — Chris McKenna, Protect Young Eyes

"The last decade of inaction on social media has allowed massive companies to make billions by exploiting our children for profit," said Adam Billen, Vice President of Public Policy at Encode. "We cannot afford to look back ten years from now and realize we've made the same mistake with AI." — Adam Billen, Encode AI

"We are proud to sign onto this urgent national declaration because we are already witnessing the next wave of harm unfold—AI-powered products and algorithms deployed recklessly across social media platforms, with children once again paying the price. The same social media industry that profited while fueling a youth mental health crisis is now racing to embed AI tools—chatbots, recommendation algorithms, immersive avatars—without sufficient safeguards, testing, or transparency. The Organization for Social Media Safety strongly urges Congress to reform Section 230 to ensure that social media companies bear full legal accountability for the design, deployment, and impact of AI systems on their platforms. This is not about the future. This is about now. And we must act before another generation is put at risk." — Marc Berkman, Organization for Social Media Safety

"The government must make it clear that Section 230 immunity should not apply to generative AI products, like AI chatbots, so that companies can be held liable for real-life harms caused by their product design, especially to our children. And Congress should seriously consider, age restricting AI chatbots entirely, as they are proving to be extremely dangerous, even deadly, to America's children." — Clare Morell, The Ethics and Public Policy Center

"Parent survivors of children lost to social media harms know the devastating consequences of unleashing state-of-the-art technology on kids without considering their safety. If these new AI chatbots are not immediately and stringently regulated, many more families will suffer the same fate that ours' have. Our kids are not, and should never be, Big Tech's guinea pigs." — Maurine Molak, ParentsSOS

"Count On Mothers supports Angel Q because our nationwide research shows that mothers – across every region, background, and political ideology – are urgently seeking tech solutions that reduce screen addiction, protect kids from harmful content, predatory people and marketing, and promote real and trusting connection at home. Angel Q directly reflects what mothers are asking for: safer, healthier technology that supports family well-being." — Jennifer Bransford, Count on Mothers

"Our children cannot be guinea pigs in the AI arms race." — Nicki Reisberg, Scrolling 2 Death

"It is time to hold these tech companies responsible for their reckless attacks on our youth." — Brandon Guffey, SC House District 48- Less Than 3 Non Profit

"When social media exploded onto the scene, safety was an afterthought and kids paid the price with their lives. Artificial intelligence is going to be even more destructive if we don't respond swiftly to the urgent for protection and accountability. We must stand together for the sake of entire generation." — Sara Siegand, Parents Who Fight

“Artificial Intelligence requires robust safeguards because children are particularly vulnerable to its risks and harms. These include; Exposure to inappropriate, violent and sexually explicit content - Misinformation and manipulation - Privacy risks - Psychological impacts - Exploitation - Addiction and overuse. We ask that Congress addresses this as a matter of urgency. For far too long Big Tech has gone unregulated and this has resulted in immense suffering for our children and a colossal loss of life.” Sonya Ryan OAM - Carly Ryan Foundation

“ENOUGH. It's 2025, not 1996. Our children deserve safe technology that makes their lives better, not worse with many dangers.” — Lynn Shaw, Lynn's Warriors

"At Eagle Venture Fund, we believe technology should elevate human dignity and solve the world's most pressing problems — especially for children, who are uniquely vulnerable to manipulation and harm. The trajectory of AI must be guided by principled, wise designs, not a race for engagement or profit at any cost." — Wes Lyons, General Partner, Eagle Venture Fund

“When we first unleashed the power of the internet in the late 90s, and smartphones a decade later, we were so entranced by everything these tools could unlock for us as adults that we didn't spare a thought for how they would impact our kids. Now, with AI, we have a chance to learn from those mistakes, and get it right from the beginning. With robust age-verification technology available to us now to differentiate users from one another, we must insist that developers create products that are age-appropriate, and leave parents in control of their children's digital experiences.” — Brad Littlejohn, American Compass

“AI offers tremendous benefits, provided we can order it to our human needs and aims, rather than the other way round. Prudent regulation is especially necessary to safeguard children's normal development.” — Mary Harrington, Writer

"Social media and excessive screen time are no longer just lifestyle concerns — they are a full-blown public health crisis for our kids. We're seeing the mental health toll in real time, in our clinics and trauma bays. Healthcare must step up, lead with urgency, and treat digital exposure as the serious health determinant it is. The time to act is now." — Dr. Chethan Sathya, Pediatric Trauma Surgeon & Public Health Leader

“As a mental health therapist specializing in addiction, I cannot find words strong enough to underscore the urgent and dire need to protect children from today's technological terrors which target and prey on them, specifically at vulnerable and crucial developmental stages. This developmental disruption will reverberate through generations-for which we carry the burden, if we choose not to act.” — MaryAnn Michaelis, Addo Recovery-Washington

“Kids need protection from adult AI. Parents cannot keep children safe from AI without support that includes industry wide regulation to compel tech companies to do better. — Sarah Gallagher Trombley, Digital Mom Media

“The harms AI is already inflicting on children aren't accidents. They're the inevitable result of a system with no guardrails, where tech companies get rich and kids pay the price. As AI becomes faster, smarter, and more advanced, the consequences for children could become catastrophic. If we are going to give children AI, it needs to have safeguards to protect them.” — Dalia Hashad, AI Child Safety Initiative (AI CSI)

“Our children’s safety is a matter of national security. From predatory chatbots designed in Silicon Valley to weaponized algorithms unleashed by the Chinese Communist Party, our nation’s youth are under constant attack. American Security Fund urges Congress to act and ensure ethical human-centric technological development to protect the health and safety of our children.” — Devan Patel, American Security Fund

“I tested a chat bot as my younger self, ready to end my life. The fact that a billion dollar business doesn’t have safe guards for low hanging fruit is pure neglect. AI can’t save kids, but regulation is the first step.” — Larissa May, Halfthestory & Ginko

“I am deeply concerned about the access children have to platforms like ChatGPT on their school-issued devices as well. These are health-harming products that are not designed with a child's developmental needs in mind and serve only to benefit the companies who created these products. We must act now.” — Emily Cherkin, The Screentime Consultant