

## Majority of state attorneys general seek warnings for youth on social media

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Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum is leading a bipartisan campaign with 41 state attorneys general who are prodding Congress to require a U.S. surgeon general warning for young people on social media platforms.

Rosenblum, president of the National Association of Attorneys General, sent a letter on Monday to Congress urging action amid heightened concern about the role that algorithms of social media can play in youth mental health, including depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

“A warning would not only highlight the inherent risks that social media platforms presently pose for young people, but also complement other efforts to spur attention, research and investment into the oversight of social media platforms,” attorneys general wrote in the letter, sent to Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican.

The letter also noted how platforms feature irresistible algorithmic recommendations, infinite scrolling that automatically loads new content as the user scrolls down a page and a constant stream of notifications that are designed to keep kids relentlessly engaged on the platforms, even at the expense of taking breaks, engaging in other activities, or sleeping.

The letter follows the National Association of Attorney General's summit last week in Portland, which highlighted Rosenblum's push as the group's president to focus on youth issues.

Rosenblum said in a statement that youth face challenges and asked Congress to move with urgency and hold the tech industry accountable.

"Our youth face challenges we never had to contend with when we were young, and many of those challenges are amplified by the platforms, companies and features prevalent across social media," Rosenblum said.

#### Surgeon general recommendations

In June, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released an advisory about social media use and its potential negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

"The most common question parents ask me is, 'is social media safe for my kids'. The answer is that we don't have enough evidence to say it's safe, and in fact, there is growing evidence that social media use is associated with harm to young people's mental health," Murthy said in a statement. "Children are exposed to harmful content on social media, ranging from violent and sexual content, to bullying and harassment. And for too many children, social media use is compromising their sleep and valuable in-person time with family and friends."

The surgeon general's 2023 advisory recommends that technology companies design and assess their platforms to prioritize children's safety and health and for parents to establish "tech-free zones" to encourage in-person relationships. The advisory also calls for more research to establish standards for social media and youth mental health and encourages youth to limit their time on social media.

Up to 95% of youth ages 13 to 17 reported they use social media, with more than a third saying they use social media "almost constantly," the advisory said. Those figures come from a 2022 Pew Research Center report that looked at youth use on platforms that include Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok.

That report also found disparities in social media use among youth in minority communities. Overall, 47% of Hispanic teens and 45% of Black teens reported they used an online platform almost constantly, while 26% of white teens did, the report said.

Besides Oregon, the letter was signed by attorneys general from Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire,

New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Attorneys general from American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands, both U.S. territories, also signed the letter.

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