

General Law Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5037 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT PROMOTING THE SAFETY OF MINORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Title: PLATFORMS.

Vote Date: 3/11/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/18/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL

Governor Lamont, in partnership with the General Law Committee and Attorney General Tong

REASONS FOR BILL

This bill aims to protect Connecticut youth from exposure to social media companies' addictive algorithms. It is substantially similar to the prior session's [HB 6857](#), which passed the House with strong bipartisan support. Governor Lamont's [written testimony](#) and Attorney General William Tong's [written testimony](#) both give detailed explanations of the reasons for the bill.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY

[Governor Ned Lamont](#) testified in support of the bill because it prioritizes the health and development of Connecticut youth. He writes that although many social media platforms have introduced teen accounts that include some of the safety features mentioned in the bill, none of these platforms protect kids from exposure to addictive algorithms. Governor Lamont notes that one developer referred to these algorithms as “behavioral cocaine.” He thanks Attorney General Tong and Representative Turco for their work on the bill last year, when it gained bipartisan support in the House. Overall, Governor Lamont urges the committee to once again support this bill.

[Comptroller Sean Scanlon](#) testified in support of HB 5037, characterizing the negative impacts of social media as an emerging public health crisis. He states that the bill protects minors from infinite scrolling algorithms, and as a parent, he appreciates that it empowers parents with a variety of tools to protect their children. Comptroller Scanlon expresses concern about social media use resulting in increased anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying

among young people, and he argues that the bill helps address these issues while maintaining fair access to social media platforms.

[Attorney General William Tong](#) expressed support for HB 5037, which he notes is largely the same as last year's HB 6857. He writes, "We must prioritize the health and development of our youth by enabling parental supervision, rather than setting young people up to fall victim to addictive and destructive social media algorithms." Attorney General Tong argues that we cannot trust platforms to regulate themselves, citing his office's ongoing suit against Meta for engaging in harmful practices. He urges the committee to protect young people's health and well-being by favorably reporting the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

[NAMI \(National Alliance on Mental Illness\) Connecticut, Thomas Burr, Public Policy Manager](#)—NAMI supports HB 5037 because the organization has "warned parents and caregivers for years about the pitfalls and harm that can be experienced by youth who engage with others on social media platforms." They argue that social media apps have contributed to depression, anxiety, aggression, eating disorders, and even suicidal ideation among young people. They urge passage of the bill because it will protect the mental health of young people in Connecticut.

[CT Voices for Children, Carmen Clarkin, Special Assistant for Strategic Initiatives](#)—CT Voices supports HB 5037, writing that the bill encourages safety "by design" with its protective default settings for minors' accounts. They write that although social media can help young people find community, research also indicates that young people are neurologically more susceptible to social media's addictive features. Because young people are heavily engaged on social media, algorithms that intend to enhance the user's experience can also cause harm. They cite a study indicating that when platforms use "deceptive techniques, users are up to four times more likely to make choices contrary to their interests." In particular, CT Voices expresses particular support for the mental health warning label requirement and the one-hour limit on algorithmic feeds, comparing these requirements to those placed on the tobacco industry in 1965.

[Connecticut Children's, Dr. Robert Keder, Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician](#)—Connecticut Children's supports HB 5037. Dr Keder asserts that the bill takes into account current research on the effects of social media use on minors, pointing to his clinical expertise supporting children, families, and other professionals who support children's well-being. He cites studies indicating that minors report that certain design features, including push notifications, algorithmic feeds, and infinite scrolling, extend the amount of time they stay on social media platforms. Dr. Keder details an additional study that asserts that digital citizenship and digital literacy initiatives are not enough to protect children from the negative impacts of social media use. He urges the committee to support the bill, as it provides research-backed protections for children and adolescents.

[John Murphy, Associate Professor, University of Connecticut](#)—Professor Murphy testified in support of HB 5037, describing social media as a "mass behavioral experiment" that exploits children's undeveloped executive functioning for corporate profit. He explains that minors are not developmentally equipped to handle social media environments that are

explicitly engineered to maximize engagement. Professor Murphy cites studies indicating that rates of anxiety, depression, body image disorders, sleep disruption, and compulsive use patterns have risen “in direct correlation with smartphone-based social media adoption.” He argues that the bill’s protections are comparable to the restrictions the state places on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling for minors.

Heidi Olson, Founder and President, Paradigm Shift Training and Consulting--Olson expressed support for HB 5037, noting that the way children are being preyed upon has changed. She shares an account of a 12-year-old who was abused nearly 20 times in one year and who met her abusers on Snapchat. Olson also cites a study indicating that one in ten children has used AI to generate nude images of their classmates. She contends that big tech companies prioritize profit over the trauma and harm these environments can cause young people. Olson commends the committee for considering the bill’s protections for children.

Family Institute of Connecticut Action, Leslie Wolfgang, Director of Public Policy--Family Institute of Connecticut Action supports HB 5037 because it provides parents with critical support when they are outmatched by multinational corporations that use sophisticated algorithms to maximize screen time. Wolfgang argues that the bill’s provisions restore parental involvement and require more meaningful age verification. She characterizes the bill’s provisions as content-neutral protections that take privacy concerns seriously. In order to strengthen protections, Wolfgang recommends reversing the presumption of adulthood if age cannot be determined, and she suggests adding a private right of action.

An anonymous SCSU-MSW student provided written testimony in support of HB 5037. Their testimony centers around their personal experiences with social media when they were in middle and high school. They urge support of the bill because they believe that children should be protected until they are capable of making well-informed decisions on their own.

FOCUS West Hartford, Jonathan Rheume, Co-Founder--FOCUS provided written testimony in support of HB 5037. Their testimony presents what appear to be AI-generated citations in general support of the bill’s protections for minors.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION

Yankee Institute, Timothy Anop, Director of External Affairs--The Yankee Institute provided written testimony in opposition to HB 5037, with primary arguments focusing on constitutional concerns and what he characterizes as government overreach. Anop contends that the bill raises First Amendment concerns, warning that similar laws have been challenged in other states. He also contends that the bill’s default limits undermine parental authority. Anop requests that the committee oppose HB 5037 to respect constitutional boundaries and preserve families’ decision-making authority.

Net Choice, Amy Bos, Vice President of Government Affairs--NetChoice testified in opposition to HB 5037, citing perceived privacy risks and First Amendment violations. NetChoice argues that the age estimation provisions put the sensitive information of minors and adults at risk. She writes that the bill’s age estimation provisions infringe on the rights of users to protected expression. Bos argues that restrictions on algorithms prevent the exercise

of constitutionally permitted editorial discretion. In addition, she asserts that required warning labels are compelled speech and therefore unconstitutional.

Southern Connecticut Black Chamber of Commerce, Deborah A. Caviness, Founder and President

– Although the organization supports the goal of protecting youth online, it testified in opposition to the bill due to concerns regarding potential unintended consequences. Caviness writes that the restrictions on social media algorithms could negatively impact Black-owned businesses’ ability to compete. Instead of using a state-by-state approach, Caviness argues that a federal App Store Accountability framework would provide better protections for teens while avoiding unintended consequences for small businesses.

Michael Chuchev, high school student

– Chuchev opposes SB 5037 because it represents a “gross injustice” to restrict his access to social media. He rejects the idea that he needs protection from the state and condemns the bill for depriving minors of their right to access information and participate in public discourse. Chuchev points out examples of historical figures like Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and Andrew Jackson who took on extensive public roles at young ages. He asks the committee to “throw out” HB 5037.

Chamber of Progress, Brianna January, Director of State and Local Government Relations, Northeast US

– Chamber of Progress opposes HB 5037 because of its perceived impacts on speech and privacy. January argues that age verification mandates put everyone’s privacy at risk, including adults, as she maintains that platforms would be required to collect a large amount of sensitive information regarding all users. She also fears that ID collection could be improperly used for immigration enforcement. January contends that parents are not always suited to guide their children’s use of social media platforms, pointing to child abuse cases involving parents, stepparents, and other relatives. In addition, she raises First Amendment concerns and warns of potential challenges in court. Alternatively, she suggests that the committee consider digital literacy initiatives and “bell-to-bell” phone bans.

Taxpayers Protection Alliance (TPA), David Williams, President

– TPA opposes HB 5037 primarily due to concerns regarding constitutionality. TPA argues that the bill creates a de facto social media age verification mandate for all users, thereby threatening adult users’ First Amendment rights. Williams also maintains that the bill places unconstitutional limitations on sites’ ability to exercise editorial discretion. He argues that court cases in Arkansas and California have already settled this issue. Aside from constitutional concerns, Williams argues that age verification is ineffective because minors can use a virtual private network (VPN) or other workarounds. He warns that the bill could have unintended consequences that cause minors to see more “mature, violent, and generally inappropriate” content.

Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA), Kyle Sepe, State Policy Manager, Northeast Region

– Although CCIA supports the goal of protecting children online, it opposes HB 5037 because it believes the bill would impose unconstitutional restrictions on speech and create new privacy and security risks. CCIA argues that the bill would violate First Amendment protections regarding access to speech and the exercise of editorial discretion. In particular, CCIA maintains that mandatory warning labels are unconstitutional “compelled speech.” With regard to online privacy, Sepe contends that the collection of age

verification data would make users susceptible to identity theft, cyberattacks, and data breaches. CCIA suggests that the committee instead explore the implementation of digital citizenship curricula.

[Anthony Spinella](#) submitted written testimony in opposition to HB 5037, characterizing the bill as “government control” rather than “parental involvement.” He argues that the bill’s restrictions would impose one-size-fits-all mandates on all Connecticut families and maintains that warning labels are ineffective. Spinella warns that the state could face costly litigation should the bill become law. He argues that app store-level parental consent would offer a better alternative.

[Blake C. Stacey, PhD](#) submitted written testimony in opposition to HB 5037. As an operator of an independent, nonprofit social media platform, he expresses concern regarding the bill’s mandatory warning labels, characterizing them as unconstitutional. He adds that in creating a design requirement that the warning can only be dismissed by clicking a large “X,” it discriminates against blind users. Stacey argues that the bill’s reporting requirements would put Connecticut residents at risk for identity theft. In addition, he contends that the bill would control economic activity outside of the state, thereby violating the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution. Stacey details his complaints regarding the definition of “covered platform” and the meaning of “connected” in the phrase “user to whom [a] covered minor is connected.” He also maintains that the bill is based on a “flawed notion of addictiveness,” arguing that social media addiction is frequently overestimated. Stacey also notes that Washington State recently declined to advance a bill aimed at protecting minors on social media.

[Information Technology Industry Council \(ITI\), Nathan Trail, Vice President of State Government Affairs](#) submitted written testimony in opposition to HB 5037. Although Trail notes that ITI shares the goal of protecting young users online, the organization believes that the legislation could “unintentionally undermine teen safety.” Trail argues that algorithms help protect teens from exposure to inappropriate content, and they help young users find community online. ITT encourages the committee to explore other approaches to protecting teens online.

GENERAL COMMENTS

[LinkedIn, Caitlin Neill, Senior Director, Public Policy](#)—LinkedIn provided written commentary on the bill. They note that they provide services to individuals ages 16 and over, and they request an exemption for platforms that provide “career-oriented services.” Neill writes that narrowing the definition of “social media platform” would help prevent unintended consequences and provide regulatory clarity.

Requested amendment

- Provide a “narrow and clarifying exemption for platforms that primarily provide career-oriented services.” (Full language included in written testimony.)

[Age Verification Providers Association \(AVPA\), Iain Corby, Executive Director](#)—Corby provided general comments explaining that HB 5037’s age verification provisions can be implemented with various anonymous methods that preserve minors’ privacy. He asserts that various age verification techniques, including facial age estimation and digital IDs, store data

entirely on a user's own device or use other techniques that do not require platforms to collect or store sensitive information. Corby argues that the bill does not regulate speech because it does not impact the availability of content; it instead targets a product feature. His written testimony then details eight suggested changes that are intended to improve the text.

Reported by: Betsy Francolino

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