

February 18, 2026

**Testimony of Leslie Wolfgang, Director
of Public Policy, Family Institute of
Connecticut Action in favor of HB 5037,
*AN ACT PROMOTING THE SAFETY OF
MINORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.***



Across our state, we have seen growing concern about youth mental health.

Connecticut's own data tells a troubling story.

According to the Connecticut School Health Survey and CDC Youth Risk Behavior data, significant percentages of high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and many report experiencing cyberbullying. Our Department of Children and Families has repeatedly described youth mental health as a crisis. Educators and pediatricians across Connecticut echo the same concerns: social media is playing a measurable role in anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and social comparison among adolescents.

In May 2023, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy¹ issued a public health advisory finding ample evidence that social media poses a significant risk to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. He specifically called on lawmakers to strengthen and enforce age minimums for social media access. This bill answers that call at the state level.

Connecticut has long been a leader in child protection and consumer protection. We regulate vaping products. We regulate gambling. We require parental consent for minors to enter contracts, obtain tattoos, or participate in certain medical decisions. Yet today, children can create binding social media accounts — agreeing to complex corporate terms that surrender data, privacy, and behavioral information — simply by entering a false birthdate.

This bill has two straightforward objectives.

First, it requires parental consent before minors open social media accounts. That strengthens transparency between families and platforms and restores a basic layer of parental involvement.

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https://integrationacademy.ahrq.gov/news-and-events/news/surgeon-generals-advisory-social-media-and-youth-mental-health?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Second, it requires meaningful age verification. Without verification, age minimums are effectively optional. A checkbox is not a safeguard.

Importantly, this bill is content-neutral. It does not regulate speech or viewpoints. It does not dictate what platforms may host. It addresses only the access mechanism for minors. Young people remain free to engage online — with parental awareness and consent.

Privacy concerns are also taken seriously. The bill requires privacy-preserving age verification options that minimize data collection and prevent sensitive information from being stored or misused. In fact, by limiting unsupervised minor accounts, this policy reduces the volume of children’s data harvested by large technology companies.

Some argue that parents alone should manage this. But Connecticut parents are currently up against multinational corporations with sophisticated engagement algorithms designed to maximize screen time. Even attentive parents can be bypassed when a child simply enters a false birthdate and opens a secret account. This bill provides parents with a practical tool to do what many are already trying to do: protect their children’s mental health.

To strengthen this proposed legislation, I recommend reversing the presumption in subsection (2)(A) that a user is “not a covered minor” if a covered operator is unable to make a determination. Otherwise operators have an incentive to not create/utilize better technology to determine if minors are contracting with operators.

This bill also relies on the strained resources of the state to enforce its provisions. I strongly recommend we add a private cause of action to this bill, which I have included in my written testimony. Children are suffering and families are being undermined, they should have recourse to the courts in order to enforce this law.

The bill would also benefit from more robust enforcement of contractual restrictions with regard to app stores. I’m happy to work with the administration to share model policies that are being proposed and adopted across the country to strengthen this important consumer protection.

Section (1)(h) Private right of action.

(a) Beginning [insert date], a person may bring an action against a covered operator that does not comply with a requirement of subsection (2).

(b) A suit filed under the authority of this section shall be filed in the court for the district in which a person bringing the action resides.

(c) If a court finds that an entity has violated a provision of subsection (2), the person who brings an action under this section is entitled to:

(1) an award of reasonable attorney fees and court costs; and (2) an amount equal to the greater of:

(A) \$10,000 per each incident of violation; or

(B) actual damages for financial, physical, and emotional harm incurred by the person bringing the action, if the court determines that the harm is a direct consequence of the violation or violations.

(C) punitive damages

(d) For purposes of this section, a violation shall include

(1) the creation and/or retention of a minor user's account without following the procedures set forth in section (1); or

(2) the retention of any identifying information of the individual(s), age-verification information, or consent or consent revocation information that a user or parent or guardian of a user provided to either a social media platform or a third party pursuant to the requirements of this section, after access to the social media platform has been granted; or

(3) the disclosure of any identifying information of the individual(s), age-verification information, or consent or consent revocation information that a user or parent or guardian of a user provided to either a social media platform or a third party pursuant to the requirements of this section, unless required by law.

Learn more about Family Institute of Connecticut Action by visiting ctfamily.org or contacting Leslie Wolfgang at ppdirector@ctfamily.org.