



Tech Oversight

CALIFORNIA

May 21, 2025

Re: Support AB 56 (Bauer-Kahan) Social media: warning labels

Assemblymembers Bauer-Kahan, Kalra, Lowenthal, Ortega, Papan, and Wicks:

Tech Oversight California (TOC), an advocacy organization that champions meaningful tech accountability reforms that address Big Tech's toxic business model and provide powerful online protections for Californians, wishes to express support for AB 56.

Policymakers and advocates have been sounding the alarm on the teen mental health crisis for more than a decade. The statistics they point to are staggering: about a third of teen girls have seriously considered attempting suicide, about 40 percent of all teens report feeling “persistently sad or hopeless,” and more than one in ten Black and Latino students say they have made a suicide plan in the past year.¹

These deeply troubling trends associated with adolescent mental health began taking shape around 2012, just when smartphones and social media became ubiquitous components of American society. Studies conducted by leading experts including the U.S. Surgeon General show that mental health issues can be exacerbated by how long kids stay online and by how platforms encourage continuous use by design.

Adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on social media face double the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms, and the average daily use in this age group, as of the summer of 2023, was 4.8 hours.² Excessive online exposure driven by addictive algorithmic design can disrupt sleep, lower self-esteem, and promote other harmful behaviors.

¹ [Data Summary & Trends Report for Dietary, Physical Activity, and Sleep Behaviors | Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System \(YRBSS\) | CDC](#)

² [Opinion | Surgeon General: Social Media Platforms Need a Health Warning - The New York Times](#)

AB 56 addresses these issues by requiring warnings to users at key intervals when their usage may reach levels linked to mental health risks. These black box notifications, with a warning from the US Surgeon General, would be prominently displayed on the screen when the user initially accesses an online platform, again after three hours of cumulative use, and again every hour thereafter.

Social media warning labels are an idea gaining grassroots momentum across the country. That's because warning labels are a solution with ample public health and legal precedent – a solution that can work hand in hand with transparency and accountability to create a digital world where kids thrive instead of being preyed upon by companies that knowingly put them in harm's way.

Tech Oversight California recognizes that much of our current understanding of how platforms knowingly exacerbate the youth mental health crisis comes from whistleblowers³ and through litigation⁴ – and that some critics of this bill have pointed to the need for more robust data on the link between social media and youth mental health. Therefore, we suggest that the State of California take additional proactive measures to better fulfill the need for data and transparency about social media and mental health.

We ask the authors to consider expanding this bill to include the creation of a public research center. Such research could be funded by the companies, managed by the State, and require the companies share internal data and research related to minor users and mental health.

Whistleblowers Frances Haugen, Arturo Bejar, and Sarah Wynn-Williams have shown that these companies have knowledge of how their products harm kids, including increased risks of depression, anxiety, and suicide, but choose to do nothing. Given the harms society has already seen related to this emerging technology, platforms can no longer be permitted to move fast and break things – especially when it comes to our kids' wellbeing.

At a bare minimum, platforms must provide transparent, easy-to-understand disclosures to users and take steps to mitigate foreseeable harm. Additional research could help laws keep pace with emerging technology, rather than waiting for litigation and/or whistleblowers to expose knowingly harmful business practices.

³ [Meta engineer testifies before Congress on Instagram's harms to teens | AP News](#)

⁴ [Social Media Lawsuit History & Updates](#)

AB 56 is a commonsense, straightforward measure and Tech Oversight California is proud to be listed among its supporters. We look forward to working with you to advance and strengthen this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sacha Haworth', enclosed within a dashed rectangular border.

Sacha Haworth

Executive Director, Tech Oversight California