



Tech Oversight

CALIFORNIA

May 5, 2025

Re: Support SB 243 (Padilla) Companion Chatbots

Senators Padilla, Becker, and Weber-Pierson:

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 SB 243.

Companion chatbots are being programmed to sound increasingly human-like with the ability to communicate in a way that feels real and believable. The more human they sound, the more engaging the experience becomes, and the more trustworthy they appear to users. Chatbots are programmed to respond appropriately to human emotions, but without the ability to *feel* these emotions.

For child users, this is a perfect storm of developmental chaos whereby children are drawn deeper into artificial relationships during a critical time of their adolescent development. Rather than providing expert guidance, chatbot companions typically validate dangerous behaviors, often misunderstand questions, and reinforce delusions, thus worsening psychological vulnerabilities leading to damaging and sometimes fatal outcomes.

SB 243 takes a number of critical first steps in the regulation of this powerful new technology. The bill requires that consumers are, at a minimum, informed about the nature of the technology and that platforms create protocols to address suicidal ideation and self-harm. Critical to transparency and meaningful reform, the bill also requires regular third-party audits and data reporting to the State Department of Health Care Services.

Critical to the enforcement of these provisions is a private right of action with at least \$1000 per violation for individuals harmed by a violation of SB 243, a provision we

consider critical to ensuring this bill is effective in its aim to protect kids from this emerging threat and communicate with companies in a language they understand.

Given the harms society has already seen related to this emerging technology, platforms must not be permitted to move fast and break things. As major companies like Meta launch AI chatbots aimed at kids that have serious, glaring safety flaws,¹ the stakes could not be clearer. As a Meta whistleblower recently testified, the company uses behavioral marketing to target vulnerable children² – a strategy they no doubt intend to continue, using these chatbots as a new and powerful tool to enable the collection and monetization of kids' most personal data. At a bare minimum, platforms must take steps to mitigate foreseeable harm and provide transparent, easy-to-understand disclosures to users.

SB 243 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 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

¹ Wall Street Journal: [Meta's 'Digital Companions' Will Talk Sex With Users—Even Children](#) (4/26/25)

² TechCrunch: [Meta whistleblower Sarah Wynn-Williams says company targeted ads at teens based on their 'emotional state'](#) (4/9/25)