

## **‘OUR KIDS ARE IN CRISIS’**

### **NY bills target data, addictive social media to protect youth**

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New York officials are pushing to ban internet companies from exploiting personal data and using addictive social media features in ways that harm youth mental health and development.

That prohibition is included in new legislation that seeks to tightly restrict how children under age 18 access and use the internet, Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement announcing the bills.

There are “devastating mental health effects” linked to excessive social media use, she added, that fueled increased rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and self-harm among children.

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“Our kids are in crisis, and the adults in the room need to step up,” Hochul said.

The risks are greatest for teen girls, who were experiencing record high levels of violence, sadness and suicide risk, with nearly three in five feeling persistently sad or hopeless in 2021, a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report shows. That represents a nearly 60% increase and the highest level reported over the past decade for teen girls. And all teens reported some level of increases, including in experiences of violence and suicidal thoughts and behaviors, CDC found.

#### **How will NY stop addictive feeds?**

The first bill, called the Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation for Kids Act, would require social media companies to restrict key addictive features on their platforms, according to the governor’s office. Currently, platforms supplement the content that users view from the accounts they follow by serving them content from accounts they do not follow or subscribe to.

This content is curated using algorithms that gather and display content based on a variety of factors. However, algorithmic feeds have been shown to be addictive because they prioritize content that keeps users on the platform longer, the governor’s office noted.

Among the bill details:

- Provide users under 18 with a default chronological feed from users they already follow. Users may also search for specific topics of interest. Minors may opt in to receiving addictive feeds with parental consent.
- Allow parents to block access to social media platforms for minors between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m. and limit the total number of hours per day that a minor spends on platforms.
- Prohibit social media platforms from sending notifications to minors from midnight to 6 a.m. without parental consent.

Some of the penalties include seeking damages or civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation. The bill would also allow any parent/guardian of a covered minor to sue for damages of up to \$5,000 per user per incident,

or actual damages, whichever is greater.

### **How will NY ban online data collection from youth?**

The other bill, called the New York Child Data Protection Act, would prohibit all online sites from collecting, using, sharing, or selling personal data of anyone under the age of 18, unless they receive informed consent or unless doing so is strictly necessary for the purpose of the website.

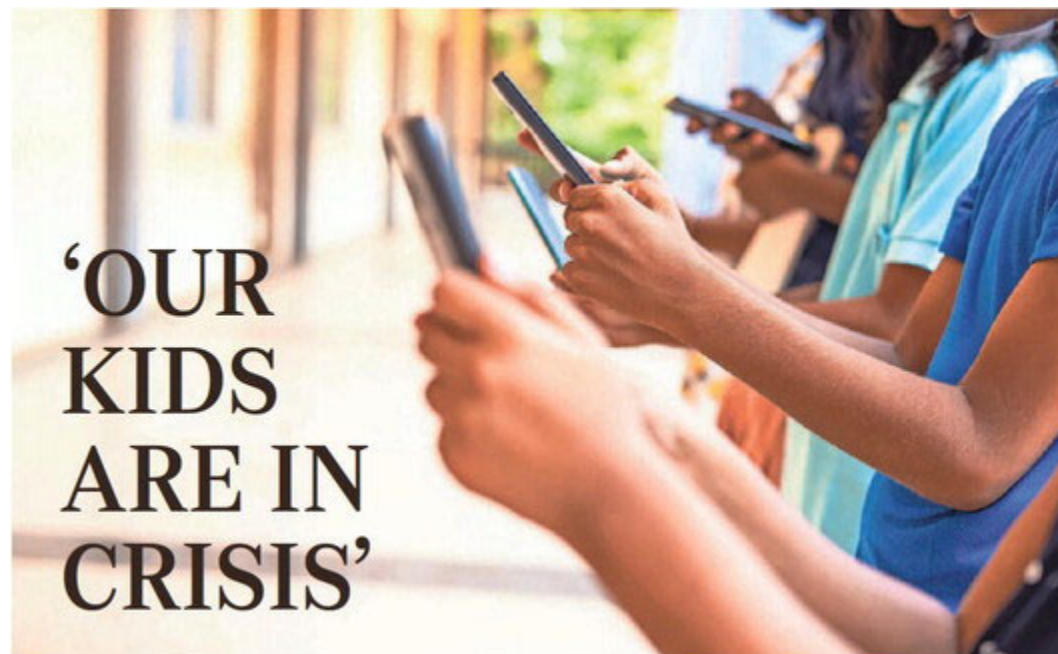
For users under 13, that informed consent must come from a parent. The bill authorizes the Attorney General's Office to enforce the law and may enjoin, seek damages, or civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation.

California last year became the first state to approve legislation protecting children's privacy online. Nationally, Congress is debating a variety of bills aimed at regulating technology companies to limit its negative impact on youth mental health.

In addition to internet issues, lengthy waits for access to inpatient pediatric mental health programs have contributed to New York's youth mental health crisis. An ongoing state effort to add hundreds of mental health hospital beds aims to reduce those waits, but some advocates and providers assert more needs to be done.

*USA TODAY Network contributed to this report*

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**New York officials are pushing to ban internet companies from exploiting personal data and using addictive social media features in ways that harm youth mental health and development. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO**



**Diane Tanner and Sara Taylor, both of Rochester, pack gift items in BIPOC Peeeeek Project's office at Montgomery Neighborhood Center in Rochester earlier this year. Taylor has advocated for improved mental health care access for youths in New York, drawing from her family's struggles to get help.**  
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