



February 5, 2026

Assembly Children and Families Committee  
Attn: Sam Hope  
2 East Main St  
Madison, WI 53702

## Re: AB 963 – “Relating to: Social Media Accounts for Minors” (Oppose)

Dear Chair Snyder and Members of the Assembly Children and Families Committee:

On behalf of the Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA), I write to respectfully oppose AB 963 in advance of the Committee hearing on February 5, 2026. CCIA is an international, not-for-profit trade association representing a broad cross-section of communications and technology firms.<sup>1</sup> Proposed regulations on the interstate provision of digital services therefore can have a significant impact on CCIA members.

CCIA firmly believes that children are entitled to greater security and privacy online. Our members have designed and developed settings and parental tools to individually tailor younger users’ online use to their developmental needs. For example, various services allow parents to set time limits, provide enhanced privacy protections by default for known child users, and other tools allow parents to block specific sites entirely.<sup>2</sup> This is also why CCIA supports implementing digital citizenship curricula in schools, to not only educate children on proper social media use but also help teach parents how they can use existing mechanisms and tools to protect their children as they see fit.<sup>3</sup>

However, protecting children from harm online does not include a generalized power to restrict ideas to which one may be exposed. Lawful speech cannot be suppressed solely to protect young online users from ideas or images that a legislative body disfavors.<sup>4</sup> While CCIA shares the goal of increasing online safety, this bill presents the following concerns.

### Courts have repeatedly struck down laws containing speech restrictions intended to prevent harm to minors.

In 1997, the Supreme Court held that “the First Amendment does not tolerate” laws that “reduce[] the adult population ... to reading only what is fit for children.”<sup>5</sup> Yet AB 963 effectively does exactly this: in order to restrict access to content potentially harmful to children, the

<sup>1</sup> For more than 50 years, CCIA has promoted open markets, open systems, and open networks. CCIA members employ more than 1.6 million workers, invest more than \$100 billion in research and development, and contribute trillions of dollars in productivity to the global economy. A list of CCIA members is available at <https://www.ccianet.org/members>.

<sup>2</sup> Competitive Enterprise Institute, *Children Online Safety Tools*, <https://cei.org/children-online-safety-tools/> (last updated June 10, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Jordan Rodell, *Why Implementing Education is a Logical Starting Point for Children’s Safety Online*, Disruptive Competition Project (Feb. 7, 2023), <https://project-disco.org/privacy/020723-why-implementing-education-is-a-logical-starting-point-for-childrens-safety-online/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Erznoznik v. City of Jacksonville*, 422 U.S. 205, 212–14 (1975). See also *FCC v. Pacifica Found.* 438 U.S. 726, 749–50 (1978); *Pinkus v. United States*, 436 U.S. 293, 296–98 (1978).

<sup>5</sup> *Reno v. ACLU*, 521 U.S. 844, 888 (1997) (cleaned up).

proposed bill would restrict both children and adults' access to such content. The First Amendment applies to teens as well as adults,<sup>6</sup> and to content posted on social media.<sup>7</sup>

Nor do states have the authority to require parental consent for such viewing; the Court has likewise rejected the argument that “the state has the power to prevent children from hearing or saying anything without their parents’ prior consent.”<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the proposed bill unconstitutionally undermines established free speech protections for users of all ages.

The Court further held in 2024 that “regulating the content-moderation policies” of websites “to change the speech that will be displayed there... is a preference” that states “may not impose.”<sup>9</sup> However, AB 963 requires numerous design requirements that restrict what content covered services can display, including “displaying the number of ‘likes,’ shares, or repostings of the minor’s posted content,” a mandate that federal courts have found to violate the First Amendment.<sup>10</sup> By broadly controlling how services organize, present, and prioritize information to users, the bill creates impermissible content-based restrictions on speech.

### **The bill does not specify how a user’s age is to be determined.**

AB 963 would require covered services to treat users under age 18 differently from all other users. However, the bill fails to explain how each covered service would determine which of their users are under 18, specifying only that “reasonable means and reasonable efforts, taking into consideration available technology and the data in the possession of the covered social media platform” be used. Nowhere does the bill specify what methods are considered “reasonable” with a given set of information. Indeed, every covered service will possess a unique set of data regarding any given user. Covered services will thus be unable to determine with certainty whether they are complying with the law.

### **The bill’s requirements undermine user privacy and competition.**

The requirement that covered services “provide an option for the parent to receive a separate password allowing the parent to monitor and set controls on the minor’s account” is highly invasive and detrimental to user privacy. While well-intentioned, such requirements will inevitably lead to the collection of more sensitive data from young users and their parents. Verifying that an individual is a user’s parent entails collecting some form of identifying document, and any document capable of verifying parenthood is likely to contain sensitive information. Requiring individuals to share sensitive personal information with third parties, including IDs or biometrics, can make recipients a prime target for identity theft, cyberattacks, or other data breaches.<sup>11</sup> These dangers are only heightened by the bill’s requirement that covered services retain such data. Such dangers are far from hypothetical: Several of the most

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., *id.* at 855-56.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 582 U.S. 98, 105-06 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> *Brown v. Ent. Merchs. Ass’n*, 564 U.S. 786, 795 n. 3 (2011).

<sup>9</sup> *Moody v. NetChoice*, 144 S. Ct. 2383, 2408 (2024).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *NetChoice v. Bonta*, 152 F.4th 1002, 1016-17 (9th Cir. 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Shoshana Weissmann, *Age-Verification Legislation Discourages Data Minimization, Even When Legislators Don’t Intend That*, R St. Inst. (May 24, 2023), <https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/age-verification-legislation-discourages-data-minimization-even-when-legislators-dont-intend-that/>.

devastating data breaches in recent years were caused by lawmakers forcing companies to collect sensitive age assurance data from their users.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, such excessive monitoring has been shown to negatively affect young people’s mental health and development.<sup>13</sup> This provision is therefore at odds with the bill’s ostensible goal of protecting young users online.

The bill’s age assurance provisions will be detrimental as well if they are interpreted to require the collection of sensitive user data. There is no perfect method of age determination, and the more data a method collects, the greater risk it poses to consumer privacy<sup>14</sup> and small business sustainability.<sup>15</sup> Such policies run contrary to the data minimization principles underlying federal and international best practices for privacy protection.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, such mandates can undermine competition. A recent Digital Trust & Safety Partnership (DTSP) report, *Age Assurance: Guiding Principles and Best Practices*, contains more information regarding guiding principles for age assurance and how digital services have used such principles to develop best practices.<sup>17</sup> The report found that “smaller companies may not be able to sustain their business” if forced to determine user ages, and that “[h]ighly accurate age assurance methods may depend on collection of new personal data such as facial imagery or government-issued ID.”<sup>18</sup>

This danger is particularly acute given the bill’s requirement that covered services update their estimates of users’ ages every 100 hours, an excessive compliance obligation that provides no compensating benefit to consumers and would prove especially burdensome for smaller businesses. To avoid these problems, CCIA recommends explicitly allowing self-attestation as a reasonable method of age assurance under this bill, as this method does not require the collection of sensitive user data and allows small businesses to better compete with their more established counterparts.

## **To avoid restricting teens’ access to information, AB 963 should regulate users under 13 rather than 18 in accordance with established practices.**

AB 963 defines “minor” as an individual less than 18. Due to the nuanced ways in which children under the age of 18 use the internet, it is imperative to appropriately tailor such

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Mark Tsagas, *Online Age Checking Is Creating a Treasure Trove of Data for Hackers*, *The Conversation* (Nov. 11, 2025), <https://theconversation.com/online-age-checking-is-creating-a-treasure-trove-of-data-for-hackers-268586>.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Hannah Quay-de la Valle, *The Chilling Effect of Student Monitoring: Disproportionate Impacts and Mental Health Risks*, *Ctr. for Democracy & Tech.* (May 5, 2022), <https://cdt.org/insights/the-chilling-effect-of-student-monitoring-disproportionate-impacts-and-mental-health-risks/> (finding that “Monitoring programs, if not carefully implemented, can stifle growth and leave students vulnerable to the chilling effect, placing their mental health at risk”).

<sup>14</sup> Kate Ruane, *CDT Files Brief in NetChoice v. Bonta Highlighting Age Verification Technology Risks* (Feb. 10, 2025), <https://cdt.org/insights/cdt-files-brief-in-netchoice-v-bonta-highlighting-age-verification-technology-risks/>.

<sup>15</sup> Engine, *More Than Just a Number: How Determining User Age Impacts Startups* (Aug. 2024), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/571681753c44d835a440c8b5/t/66ad1ff867b7114cc6f16b00/1722621944736/More+T+han+Just+A+Number+-+Updated+August+2024.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Fair Information Practice Principles (FIPPs), *Fed. Privacy Council*, <https://www.fpc.gov/resources/fipps/>; Principle (c): Data Minimisation, *U.K. Info. Comm’r Off.*, <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/data-protection-principles/a-guide-to-the-data-protection-principles/data-minimisation/>.

<sup>17</sup> *Age Assurance: Guiding Principles and Best Practices*, *Digital Trust & Safety Partnership* (Sept. 2023), [https://dtspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DTSP\\_Age-Assurance-Best-Practices.pdf](https://dtspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DTSP_Age-Assurance-Best-Practices.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 10.

treatments to respective age groups. For example, if a 16-year-old is conducting research for a school project, it is expected that they would come across, learn from, and discern from a wider array of materials than a 7-year-old on the internet playing video games. We would suggest changing the scope of covered users to be minors under the age of 13 to align with the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) standard.<sup>19</sup> This would also allow for those over 13, who use the internet much differently than their younger peers, to continue to benefit from its resources.

## Terms such as “addictive” in this online context lack adequate scientific foundation.

AB 963 prohibits the use of several design features that it deems “addictive.” The term “addictive,” however, has no established meaning in the online context. Humans engage in various compulsive and repetitive behaviors — some of which may negatively impact physical and/or mental health. Compulsive behaviors could range from binge eating unhealthy foods to exercising excessively to watching favorite shows for hours on end. However, certain regular activities do not necessarily amount to “addictions”. The most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition Text Revision (DSM-5-TR)* declined to include definitions for “Internet gaming disorder,” “Internet addiction,” “excessive use of the Internet,” or “excessive use of social media,” noting that “[g]ambling disorder is currently the only non-substance-related disorder included in the *DSM-5-TR* chapter ‘Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders.’”<sup>20</sup>

The connected nature of social media has led to allegations that online services are negatively impacting teenager’s mental health. Researchers argue that this theory is not well supported by existing evidence and often mirrors the “moral panic” associated with new technologies. Studies from the leading universities indicate that depression has virtually no causal relation to social media use. The effects are nuanced,<sup>21</sup> individualized, reciprocal, and gender-specific.

This complexity was reinforced when the U.S. Surgeon General released an Advisory entitled *Social Media and Youth Mental Health*. Many were quick to highlight only the harms and risks it detailed. However, the Advisory is much more complex and also discusses many potential benefits of social media use among children and adolescents. For example, the Advisory concludes that social media provides young people with communities and connections with others who share identities, abilities, and interests.<sup>22</sup> It can also provide access to important information and create spaces for self-expression. Research further details that social media can especially benefit marginalized youth, including racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender minorities, as online peer support can mitigate the stresses they face.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See 15 U.S.C. § 6501(1).

<sup>20</sup> Am. Psychiatric Ass’n, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition Text Revision* (2022).

<sup>21</sup> Amy Orben et al., *Social Media’s Enduring Effect on Adolescent Life Satisfaction*, PNAS (May 6, 2019), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1902058116>.

<sup>22</sup> Off. of the Surgeon Gen., U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory, Social Media Has Both Positive and Negative Impacts on Children and Adolescents* (2023), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK594763/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*; see also Jennifer Marino et al., *Social Media Use and Health and Well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth: Systematic Review*, J. Med. Internet Rsch. (Sept. 22, 2021), <https://www.jmir.org/2022/9/e38449>.



## The private right of action would result in the proliferation of frivolous lawsuits and questionable claims, and exorbitant statutory damages.

AB 963 permits users to bring legal action against persons that have been accused of violating new regulations. The bill would enable “A minor or parent of the minor aggrieved by a negligent, reckless, or knowing violation” of this law to “bring a civil action against a covered social media platform” for “\$10,000 or actual damages, whichever is greater” for each knowing or reckless violation, as well as punitive damages if it was “part of a pattern of reckless or knowing conduct.”

By creating a new private right of action, the measure would open the doors of Wisconsin’s courthouses to plaintiffs advancing frivolous claims with little evidence of actual injury. This danger is particularly acute given the vaguely defined requirements noted above. As lawsuits prove extremely costly and time-intensive, it is foreseeable that these costs would be passed on to individuals in Wisconsin, disproportionately impacting smaller businesses and startups across the state. Accordingly, CCIA recommends granting the state exclusive authority to enforce these requirements.

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We appreciate the Committee’s consideration of these comments and stand ready to provide additional information as the Legislature considers proposals related to technology policy.

Respectfully submitted,

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Computer & Communications Industry Association