

Governor Sherrill Signs Kids' Online Safety Package to Protect New Jersey Children and Support Youth Mental Health

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New Laws Establish an Age-Appropriate Design Code and Social Media Research Center, Putting Stronger Protections in Place for Children and Giving Parents More Tools to Keep Their Families Safe Online

New Jersey Announces Funding Opportunity for Social Media Center to Support Research and Mitigate Negative Impact of Social Media Use

TRENTON – Governor Mikie Sherrill today signed a package of three bills to protect New Jersey children online, hold Big Tech accountable, address the harmful and addictive effects of social media on young people.

The legislation delivers on key elements of Governor Sherrill's Kids' Online Safety Agenda, including codifying the New Jersey Age-Appropriate Design Code and creating a Social Media Research Center to independently study social media's impacts, addictive features, and emerging risks to children. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education today announced the availability of funds to establish the Social Media Research Center at one of New Jersey's four-year public institutions of higher education, with the goal of getting the Center up and running this fall.

"Big Tech might have stopped politicians in Washington from holding them accountable, but they won't stop us here in New Jersey," **said Governor Sherrill**. "As a mom of four, I have seen firsthand how social media platforms can affect our kids and how often parents are left to fight this battle alone. Technology companies have designed platforms that hijack our kid's attention spans, constantly rolling out new, addictive features that have serious negative consequences for our children's long-term health and well-being. With these new laws, we are putting real protections in place for children online, better supporting parents across our state, and making clear that technology companies have a responsibility to put kids' safety ahead of profits."

The package signed today builds on Governor Sherrill's broader Kids' Online Safety Agenda to protect children's mental health and help parents navigate a rapidly changing digital environment. On her first day in office, Governor Sherrill [created the Office of Youth Online Mental Health Safety and Awareness](#) within the New Jersey Department of Health to coordinate efforts across state government to keep children safe online.

"New Jersey is home to world-class public institutions and renowned experts who lead the nation in research and innovation across several fields. With the signing of this legislation, OSHE is pleased to issue a notice of funding availability that will support the establishment of the Social Media Research Center at one of our four-year public colleges or universities," **said Acting Secretary of Higher Education Margo Chaly**. "This Center will play a vital role in better understanding the evolving impacts of social media on our young people, helping New Jersey balance the democratizing potential of these platforms with the urgent need to protect against their harmful and addictive effects."

"Social media is engrained in the everyday lives of youth today. We have a responsibility to address the health and safety risks that come with it," **said Dr. Raynard E. Washington, New Jersey Health Commissioner**. "Protecting kids from platforms that encourage addictive patterns of use, expose them to harmful content, and create serious online safety concerns, like bullying, is a necessary public health strategy. These new laws put policy to practice, and I look forward to promoting safer online environments for kids in NJ."

"Children should be able to learn, connect, and explore online without having their privacy violated, their mental and physical health jeopardized, or their attention manipulated for profit," **said Attorney General Jennifer Davenport**. "I thank Governor Sherrill and the Legislature for advancing this important legislation, which will help create a healthier, safer digital environment for our kids."

The three bills signed today include:

[A4015/S3413](#) **The "New Jersey Kids Code Act"** – sponsored by Assemblymembers Andrea Katz, Marisa Sweeney and Luanne Peterpaul, along with Senators Raj Mukherji and Linda Greenstein – codifies the New Jersey Age-Appropriate Design Code and requires certain online service providers to design their products with the safety and well-being of minors in mind.



Among its protections, the law limits the data companies can collect and retain from children, establishes safeguards around interactions between minors and adult users, requires platforms to set their default privacy settings for children to the highest level of privacy, and restricts certain platform features designed to keep young users constantly engaged. It also gives children and parents greater control over online experiences, including certain algorithmic recommendations and interactions, and provides mechanisms to report harmful experiences.

The law establishes enforceable standards for covered technology companies and provides avenues for accountability when those standards are violated.

[A4014/S3411](#) – sponsored by Assemblymembers Andrea Katz and Carmen Theresa Morales, along with Senators Raj Mukherji and Linda Greenstein – establishes a Social Media Research Center at a four-year public institution of higher education in New Jersey. Building on a \$500,000 investment in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, the Center will study the impacts of social media consumption and provide policymakers, families, educators, and communities with recommendations regarding addictive social media behaviors among children and minors.

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education is launching a **[request for proposals](#)** today to establish the Center, with the goal of beginning its work this fall.

[S3412/A4013](#) – sponsored by Senators Raj Mukherji and Linda Greenstein, along with Assemblymembers Andrea Katz, Cody Miller and Michelle Drulis – directs the Social Media Research Center to research the potential efficacy of warning labels and mandatory disclaimers to reduce addictive social media behaviors among children. Based upon that research, the Center is to issue a final report on its findings and policy recommendations within 18 months and support subsequent rulemaking by the New Jersey Department of Health to deter and reduce addictive social media behaviors among children.

“For something that connects us as much as social media, users today are increasingly kept from knowing the ins and outs of how these platforms are built to work, and parents carry that weight twice as much, trying to protect their child from risks they can’t even fully see,” **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. “Our children shouldn’t be forced to choose between growing up in an online world and growing up healthy, and these laws will make sure that they don’t have to. This social media bill package is good for the well-being and development of children across the State and will allow parents to worry a little bit less.”

“Age-appropriate design coding requirements start from a simple proposition: if a company knows children are using its platform, it should take reasonable steps to make that platform safer for children. It’s essential that online platforms limit the use of manipulative design practices or dark patterns and adapt their services in a way that protects children and their privacy, not harms them or keeps them continuously scrolling,” **said Senator Raj Mukherji**. “The critical safety and privacy features required by this bill are easy to implement and answer the alarm bells being rung by pediatricians and mental health professionals nationwide.”

“For too long, parents have had to compete with multimillion dollar algorithms just to keep their kids safe,” **said Assemblywoman Andrea Katz**. “That’s not a fair fight, and it’s time we leveled the playing field. Protecting our children’s mental health and safety online requires more than one solution, and this package delivers that. I’m proud we got this across the finish line and New Jersey has taken a big step to put the safety of our children first in the digital world.”

What They’re Saying

“By signing this Age-Appropriate Design Code, Governor Sherrill is shifting the burden of mitigating online harms back toward the platforms themselves, ensuring that young people can continue to build safe connections without being exploited,” **said Saahir Vazirani, 18, a member of Design It For Us**. “For too long, Big Tech has attempted to offload the responsibility for the negative consequences of their products onto children and their families. This landmark legislation acknowledges the failure of that approach, instead mandating platform-wide safeguards that prioritize young people’s safety and privacy by design.”

“Governor Mikie Sherrill promised to take on Big Tech and hold them accountable for designing better products for our kids – today, she delivered. The New Jersey Kids Code is now the strongest state safety-by-design law yet, thanks to hard work by the Governor and the legislators who championed this bill, together with community advocates led by survivor parent Erin Popolo. Their dedication to this fight and bravery in taking on the tech lobby just made the Garden State a safer place to be a kid and to raise a family,” **said Marjorie K. Connolly, Communications Director of The Tech Oversight Project**.

“Well done New Jersey! Common Sense Media applauds Gov. Sherrill and New Jersey lawmakers for making the New Jersey Kids Code Act the law of the state,” **said Danny Weiss, Chief Advocacy Officer at Common Sense Media**. “Momentum is building across the states to make kids’ well-being in the digital age a top priority and New Jersey is very much a part of this groundswell. This new law holds social media companies accountable for design choices that drive compulsive use among young people. It includes a strong duty of care, a private right of action, and attorney general enforcement.”

“These landmark pieces of legislation are critical steps to make the digital world safer for New Jersey kids,” **said Julie Scelfo, Founder and Executive Director of Mothers Against Media Addiction (MAMA)**. “MAMA parents across New Jersey and nationwide are grateful to Governor Sherrill for her leadership and for signing these bills that will protect children’s health and safety, while also holding tech companies accountable when their product designs cause harm to our kids.”



“We are grateful for the leadership of Governor Sherrill and the many legislators and advocates who are working to prioritize children's privacy, safety, and mental health,” **said Lindsey Dubman, Co-Founding Member, Dodgers Delay.** “These laws represent a crucial step toward creating a safer and healthier digital environment for New Jersey's children.”

“For Newark's youth, social media can be a powerful tool for connection, learning, and self-expression, but it can also expose young people to risks that impact their mental health and overall well-being. These bills demonstrate New Jersey's commitment to putting children first by requiring stronger safeguards, advancing research, and developing practical recommendations to address harmful online behaviors,” **said Marquise Guzman, Sr. Program Director for Neighborhood Partnerships/Executive Director of New Ark Freedom School.** “By prioritizing accountability, research, and prevention, New Jersey is helping to build a digital landscape that supports healthy youth development, advances equity, and empowers the next generation to engage with technology safely and responsibly.”

“NJSBA is proud to support this legislative package. Technology is advancing at a speed that our safeguards have struggled to match, and our children are living in that gap every day. These measures represent the bold action this moment requires, and they give educators the tools they need to protect the health and well-being of New Jersey's students,” **said Dr. Timothy Purnell, Executive Director/CEO, NJ School Boards Association.** “We are grateful to the sponsors, legislative leadership and Governor Sherrill for keeping student safety at the center of this work.”

“At the Urban League of Hudson County, we hear from parents who feel outmatched by the platforms their kids are on,” **said Tamara Parchon, President & CEO, Urban League of Hudson County.** “This legislation gives families real tools instead of just good intentions and pairing it with research center means the policy will keep pace with the technology, not lag behind it. We're grateful to Governor Sherrill and the Legislature treating this as the urgent issue it is.”

“We already know that social media can harm young people’s mental health and well-being—and there is still much more to learn,” **said Angela Kimball, Chief Advocacy Officer, Inseparable.** “New Jersey’s investment in research will give policymakers stronger evidence to act earlier, act smarter, and better protect kids and families. We applaud Governor Sherrill and the legislature for their leadership.”

“These companies intentionally built their products to keep our kids scrolling, whatever the cost -- and their lobbyists fought for years to keep anyone from changing it. Today, they lost, and New Jersey chose our kids over their profits,” **said Erin Popolo, Survivor Parent Advocate; Founder, Emmy’s Champions; Founding Member, Parents Rise!** “This victory is for my daughter Emily: I fought so her memory would mean other kids are protected from what she and our family experienced -- and now, in New Jersey, they will be. Thank you to everyone who worked on this critical legislation.”

"These bills underscore the importance of addressing the impact social media has on our children, which is one of the top concerns our parents have identified. New Jersey PTA encourages healthy screen time and strengthening privacy protections for children and youth on social media and online,” **said Jackie Gibbs, President, New Jersey PTA.** “We support Governor Sherrill’s efforts as she continues to shine a spotlight on social media ensuring this critical issue stays in the forefront.”

“The same platforms that sold themselves to my generation as a means of connecting and building community stole our time and robbed us of our attention. By enacting the Kids Code, New Jersey’s Governor and legislators have shown my generation our voices and experiences matter, that Big Tech should not have stronghold over our lives, and that young people should be able to reclaim our time online and build meaningful futures outside of screens,” **said Hannah Elder, a member of the Young People’s Alliance.**

“New Jersey’s action is another powerful reminder that protecting children online is not a partisan issue, it is a responsibility,” **said Erich Mische, President & CEO of SAVE – Suicide Awareness Voices of Education.** “Governor Sherrill and state lawmakers have chosen to put the health, safety and well-being of kids ahead of the business models of some of the most powerful companies in the world. From age-appropriate design standards to mental health warning labels, states across the country are demonstrating that we do not have to accept an online environment that puts children at risk. SAVE is grateful to the parents, young people and advocates whose persistence and courage made this moment possible, and we hope New Jersey’s leadership adds even greater momentum to efforts underway across the country and in Washington.”

“Congratulations to Governor Mikie Sherrill, the New Jersey legislature, and the people of New Jersey for joining the coalition of states paving a safer online future for our children,” **said Imran Ahmed, CEO and founder of the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH).** “CCDH’s research repeatedly shows that when social media companies are left to regulate themselves, they put profit ahead of children’s safety and design platforms that keep young people hooked on a never-ending stream of harmful content. The New Jersey Kids Code disrupts that business model by requiring companies build safety into their products from the start, clearly warn families about the risks their platforms pose, and uphold a duty of care to protect children from compulsive tech use. New Jersey is turning the core principles of CCDH’s STAR Framework into real protections for children and a model for lawmakers who are waking up to the dangers of Big Tech.”

“Children should not have to sacrifice their privacy to participate in the digital world. The New Jersey Kids Code recognizes that protecting young people online starts with requiring companies to build privacy and safety into their products from the outset, rather than placing the burden on kids and families to protect themselves,” **said Alan Butler, President and Executive Director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC).** “EPIC applauds Gov. Sherrill for signing the New Jersey Kids Code into law, making clear that young people’s privacy is not something companies can trade away for engagement or profit.”



“Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey applaud Governor Sherrill and the Legislature for taking this important step to protect young people online. Our Clubs see firsthand the importance of creating safe, supportive environments where young people can thrive, both in their communities and in an increasingly digital world,” **said Susan Haspel, State Director, Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey.** “We are proud to support these efforts and look forward to continuing to work with state leaders and community partners to ensure New Jersey’s young people have the tools, resources, and support they need to succeed.”

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