

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Establish Commission to Study Effects of Social Media Usage on Youth

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**TRENTON** – With concerns growing over the impact of social media on young people, Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation to establish a commission to study the effects of social media usage both in and out of school on adolescents. The work of this commission will build on the Governor's ongoing efforts to address the mental health needs of New Jersey youth.

"Social media use is undoubtedly a significant part of many young people's lives these days, which is why it is so critical to determine the full scope of its impact on students," said Governor Murphy. "By establishing this commission, we will better understand how social media use – both in and out of school – is affecting the physical and mental health, safety, and academic performance of students to help mitigate any negative repercussions and protect the well-being of New Jersey's youth."

Under the bill (S-715/A-1992), the Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents will work to determine:

- the extent of social media usage both in and out of public schools, including the average amount of time students in various age groups spend each day on electronic devices;
- the effects that use has on the emotional health of students, including incidents of depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia, harassment, intimidation/bullying, or other disruptive behaviors;
- the effects that use has on the academic performance of students;
- and the effects that use has on the physical health of students, including incidents of sleep deprivation, weight loss or gain, or high blood pressure.

The commission will issue a final report detailing its findings, including proposed social media usage standards, effective strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media usage on student health and academic performance, and any other recommendations to help improve student health and academic performance in connection with social media usage.

The commission will be comprised of 19 members including the Commissioner of Education, four public members appointed by legislative leaders, and 14 members appointed by the Governor – including a school nurse, an expert on the collection/analysis of data concerning social media, two public school students, two parents of students enrolled in a public school, and representatives from various education, psychology, and child advocacy organizations specified in the bill.

"I appreciate the opportunity to serve on the social media commission, as we study the impact of social media on adolescents," said **Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education**. "I recognize the tremendous importance of comprehending how digital platforms shape our youth's lives, both academically and emotionally. This commission represents a vital platform to review evidence-based research, draw insights from experts, and engage in open dialogue to craft effective policies and practices. Together, we will empower New Jersey students with the knowledge, resilience, and digital literacy needed to navigate the virtual world responsibly, ensuring that social media becomes a catalyst for positive growth and meaningful connections."

"The advent of social media has really changed life as we know it -- in some ways bringing the world closer together, but in others, creating a disconnect between authentic relationships and virtual ones," said **NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "For younger users especially, overuse of social media can impact their body image, emotional health, and peer relationships, and we have to be mindful of how online bullying can be compounded through social media. By bringing together experts to study this phenomena, we can inform public policy and address a significant contributing factor to the youth mental health crisis within this country."

Sponsors of the legislation include Senator Richard Codey and Assemblyman Herb Conaway, as well as Senator Edward Durr and Assembly Members Carol Murphy and Benjie Wimberly.

"Over the past 10 years, the evolution of smart phones and social media have become a major component in the lives of adolescents," said **Senator Codey**. "Students are now connected twenty-four hours a day; linked by various social media platforms, which poses risks to academic performance. This commission will provide valuable information to evaluate the effects of this usage within our education system."

"We have a responsibility to protect our kids and provide them with the resources and support they need to live healthy, successful lives. As smartphones and social media become deeply ingrained in our society, we must take steps to understand their impact, particularly where it affects our young people. We know the heavy use of social media by adolescents can have serious negative consequences for their life and health," said **Assemblyman Herb Conaway**. "In the last decade, teen suicide rates have doubled after a prior two decades of decline, and researchers correlate this to the widespread use of social media. The commission created by this law will establish evidence-based guidelines so we can best support the physical and emotional health of New Jersey students in a world where social media and smartphones are commonplace."

"The New Jersey School Boards Association thanks Gov. Murphy and the Legislature for their work in establishing the Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents," said **Dr. Timothy Purnell, Executive Director and CEO of the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA)**. "In the last few years there has been an alarming increase in the number of students with mental health challenges. School districts have needed to add counseling staff and services to help address this crisis. NJSBA believes that the effects of social media on the development of children have not been fully researched, and we lack an understanding of the long-term impact of this technology. That view was supported by the May 23 advisory warning from the United States surgeon general, who said that there are ample indicators that social media can have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. As one of the organizations that will be represented on the Commission we look forward to working on this important effort to strengthen student mental health, and we commend New Jersey's leaders for taking this critical step to protect the health of our students."

"On behalf of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), I extend my gratitude to Senators Codey and Durr for their sponsorship of S-715 and to Governor Murphy for his endorsement of the commission to study effects on adolescents of social media usage in and out of school," said **Karen Bingert, Executive Director of New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association**. "The most powerful tool of our time slipped silently into the pockets of our children in the form of a smartphone, but, like every tool, there are risks and repercussions for its misuse and overuse. Social media, an equally powerful and risky tool in the hands of our youth, has the potential to cause deeper and more lasting bruises on our children's psyches and well-being than hitting your thumb with a hammer would, and this commission is tasked with the important role of identifying those risks, creating plans to mitigate them, and helping our schools and families find the happy balance with social media that may help our children live happily balanced lives. NJPSA looks forward to participating in this important work and commends the legislature and Governor Murphy for their proactive steps to protect our children."

"We applaud the Legislature and Governor for the creation of this Commission," said **New Jersey Education Association President Sean Spiller**. "Our educators know the negative impact of social media on our students and now, more than ever, the ways in which it contributes to the mental health crisis our students are facing. We look forward to being part of the Commission and to put forward proposals that will better protect our youth."



"NJPTA believes the effects of social media impacts the mental health in adolescence in many ways, to include lower self-esteem, depressed moods, and eating disorders," **said Sharon Roseboro, President of the New Jersey PTA.** "We encourage the education of parents and caregivers on the effects of social media relating to self-esteem development among our Adolescence. NJPTA will work rigorously with our partners and our schools to create a healthy environment for all children"

"There is no denying that social media has a profound effect on the social-emotional health and development of youth and adolescents. According to a study conducted by The Pew Research Center, a majority of teens (77%) use YouTube and Tik Tok daily," **said Ebony Grace, MFT, Chief Executive Officer of New Jersey School-Age Child Care Coalition (NJSACC).** "Whereas, there are positive aspects of social media and technology use, such as building a sense of community, youth learning content creation, and youth entrepreneurship through ESports, the potential negative effects include isolation, distortion of body image and mental health issues. Considering the negative effects of social media that are undoubtedly prevalent in our youth population today, afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programs are a means of counteracting the impact of social media usage. NJSACC supports this bill (S-715) and Governor Murphy's Youth Mental Health Initiative."

"Over the last decade, social media has become an integral part of the lives of adolescents across the country and globe. The impact of social media on the academic, physical and emotional health of youth has been a widespread concern throughout a vast array of urban/rural, socioeconomic and ethnic communities," **said Kristine Esposito, Ed.S., New Jersey Association of School Psychologists.** "The New Jersey Association of School Psychologists acknowledges the need for continued research to explore the impact of social media usage on adolescent development and is delighted to support this much-needed initiative. NJASP looks forward to contributing to an evidence-based exploration and recommendations which will further all of our youth's appropriate development and safety."

## Governor Phil Murphy

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