

EPIC'S MODEL AGE-APPROPRIATE DESIGN CODE

EPIC's Model AADC protects kids online by prohibiting addictive design features for minors, giving them control over their privacy, and preventing companies from designing to promote compulsive use.

The problem is platform design.

Kids today spend a lot of time online—often more time than they or their parents would like.¹ This is by design. The more time a user spends on certain online products, the more money the companies can make through intrusive data collection and targeted advertising. As a result, many consumer-facing tech companies, from social media to video games, chatbots, dating apps, and more, engineer their products to be “addictive.”²

Kids also often have bad experiences online. Many of these bad experiences can be traced to their lack of control over key aspects of their online experiences, like who can contact them and what content they see in their feeds. This lack of control undermines their autonomy and increases the risk of secondary harms like cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, bodily injury, and mental health harms.³

EPIC's age-appropriate design code provides the answer.

The right approach to solving this problem is not to force parents to mediate their kids' access to online products or to ban the products altogether (violating kids' own First Amendment rights and often burdening adults' access too).

Instead, we need to require companies to change the way they design their platforms so that they integrate privacy and safety by design. Making platforms less addictive will allow kids to make better choices about how much time they spend online. Giving kids tools to control their online experiences will make the time they spend online more positive. And such an approach will uplift, and not subvert, kids' autonomy online.

Tech companies' harmful design choices are:

Contributing to the youth mental health crisis by driving kids to overuse technologies at the expense of sleep, schoolwork, and healthy socializing⁴ and

Putting kids in danger online, due to the lack of visibility, location, notification, and content controls on certain platforms.⁵

Parents cannot solve this problem on their own.

In a recent Pew poll, a significant majority of parents said tech companies and lawmakers should be doing more to help.⁶

The bill, at a glance

The bill builds off of Vermont's Age-Appropriate Design Code, enacted last year, which is the strongest kids' online safety law enacted to date. The bill also integrates lessons learned from new research into the harms of addictive design and recent litigation. It:

- **Prohibits specific design practices that have already been shown to carry significant risk of harm**, like surveillance-based algorithmic feeds and geolocation tracking. These must be turned off by default for all users, but adults can still request them if they prefer.
- **Requires large companies to evaluate design features for risk of compulsive use** before implementing them for users.
- **Gives kids agency over their online experiences** by creating a "privacy by default" system along with other tools that allow kids to control the content they see in algorithmic feeds and to block unwanted contacts.
- **Gives researchers, policymakers, and users transparency into companies' design practices**, while avoiding disclosures that might trigger First Amendment protection.
- **Does not require age assurance**, but companies that do use age assurance must abide by strict privacy rules.

The bill is designed to withstand a litigation challenge.

The bill has been carefully designed to avoid concerns raised in litigation over kids' online safety laws. The bill is designed to:

- **Survive First Amendment scrutiny** by carefully protecting online speech.
- **Comply with Section 230** of the Communications Decency Act by making clear that companies can only be held liable for their own harmful design choices.
- **Not break the internet** by ensuring design changes made in response to the bill will make products better for consumers.
- **Protect small businesses** by exempting them from provisions that might burden them.

Enacting EPIC's Model Age Appropriate Design Code will make your state the national model for protecting children from harmful technology.

**We urge
your
support.**

Questions? Contact EPIC Deputy Director
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