



**House Committee on Trade, Workforce & Economic Development**  
**House Bill 4901 by Rep. Caroline Fairly**  
**Texas Medical Association and Texas Pediatric Society**  
*April 15, 2025*

Honorable Chair Button, Vice Chair Talarico, and committee members:

The Texas Medical Association (TMA) and the Texas Pediatric Society (TPS), representing more than 59,000 physician and medical student members across the state, appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in *support* of House Bill 4901 on regulating platforms and mobile app stores to protect youth from online harm.

This bill offers vital protections for Texas families navigating the digital world. Recent studies reveal that nearly half (46%) of U.S. teenagers report being on their phones “almost constantly.”<sup>1,2</sup> With variation in protections across platforms and apps it can be difficult for parents to keep track of whether their children are staying safe online. Certain apps and social media platforms can be designed with addictive algorithms to maximize the time users spend online, potentially fostering unhealthy relationships with technology.<sup>3</sup> These addictive algorithms can subtly curate and amplify harmful content that promotes eating disorders, violence, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>4,5</sup>

We are concerned about the large-scale data collection and potential exploitation of Texas children by digital platforms that monitor, track, and target minors with advertising and content.<sup>6,7</sup> Research indicates individualized behavioral advertising is inappropriate for young people who may lack critical thinking skills to recognize manipulation, increasing their risk for poor mental health and addictive behaviors. We strongly recommend measures restricting companies from collecting young users’ data without parental consent and providing tools and transparency to safeguard children and parents online.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

We support the following provisions in House Bill 4901:

- **Age verification:** This limits minors’ access to only age-appropriate content and prompts consent from an adult, protecting minors from inappropriate material;
- **Display of age ratings:** Age ratings offer clear guidance on content appropriateness for different age groups, helping adults make informed decisions in creating a safe online environment for children;
- **Parental consent:** When parents or guardians are aware of and approve the digital content their children access and purchase, they get to guide their children's decisions, ensuring they align with developmental levels and boundaries. With clearer information, parents can feel empowered knowing their kids' online activity is safe;
- **Data protection:** This bill significantly enhances the protection of minors’ personal data. By limiting data collection, enforcing encryption, mandating data deletion, and holding developers accountable, it helps prevent the misuse and exploitation of minors’ information.

TMA and TPS support ongoing research into the long-term effects of digital platforms on children's development. Requiring app developers to share their data would help researchers and regulators understand these effects and ensure online safety.<sup>11,12</sup> Thank you for the opportunity to comment. For answers to any questions, please contact Matt Dowling, TMA director of Public Affairs and lobbyist, at [matt.dowling@texmed.org](mailto:matt.dowling@texmed.org); or Clayton Travis, TPS director of Advocacy and Health Policy, at [clayton.travis@txpeds.org](mailto:clayton.travis@txpeds.org).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/12/12/teens-social-media-and-technology-2024/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17456916231185057#bibr114-17456916231185057>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13183222.2021.2003052#d1e93>

<sup>5</sup> [https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Bright\\_Futures/BF4\\_HealthySocialMedia.pdf](https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Bright_Futures/BF4_HealthySocialMedia.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2024/09/ftc-staff-report-finds-large-social-media-video-streaming-companies-have-engaged-vast-surveillance>

<sup>7</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1461444816686328>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/87565641.2016.1187033#d1e143>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-journal-of-law-and-medicine/article/algorithms-addiction-and-adolescent-mental-health-an-interdisciplinary-study-to-inform-statelevel-policy-action-to-protect-youth-from-the-dangers-of-social-media/EC9754B533553BDD56827CD9E34DFC25>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2024/7/senate-overwhelmingly-passes-children-s-online-privacy-legislation>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/research/research-areas/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry/sultan-lab-mental-health-informatics/research-areas/smartphones-social-media-and-their-impact-mental-health>

<sup>12</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7785056/#S12>