



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on September 11, 2024

## 42 State Attorneys General Calling for Federal Warning on Social Media

A coalition of 42 state attorneys general is calling on Congress to mandate a warning on social media platforms. In [a letter](#) sent to Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-La.), Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) on Tuesday, the attorneys general outlined their support for recent recommendations made by U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy.

### Social Media's Impact on Youth

The attorneys general write that social media's addictive features are harming young users. Features like infinite scrolling, persistent notifications, and personalized content are causing chronic sleep disruption. These factors are also leading to excessive screen time among adolescents, worsening their mental health. Major studies referenced in the letter link social media use to heightened levels of depression and anxiety among adolescents.

"Social media companies are exploiting children's psychological vulnerabilities through addictive and manipulative product designs," the attorneys general wrote. They highlighted that these platforms often claim to prioritize user safety but, in practice, drive engagement with features that pose harm to young people.

### Legal and Legislative Efforts to Combat the Crisis

The letter notes that several states have already taken legal action against major social media companies, including Meta and TikTok. Last year, a coalition of 45 states and the District of Columbia filed lawsuits against Meta. The plaintiffs accused the company of prioritizing user engagement over safety on Instagram, particularly for younger users. Additionally, states such as Arkansas, Indiana, and Utah have initiated litigation against TikTok, alleging violations of consumer protection laws.

Despite these state-level actions, the attorneys general argue, the issue requires federal intervention. Urging the congressional leaders to continue the research on innovative solutions to protect children's well-being in the digital age, the signatories wrote:

This ubiquitous problem requires federal action — and a surgeon general's warning on social media platforms, though not sufficient to address the full scope of the problem, would be one consequential step toward mitigating the risk of harm to youth. A warning would not only highlight the inherent risks that social media platforms presently pose for young



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people, but also complement other efforts to spur attention, research, and investment into the oversight of social media platforms.

### **State-level Legislative Measures**

The attorneys general also referenced state laws that have been passed to address social media's harmful effects on youth. New York's [Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation \(SAFE\) For Kids Act](#) and California's [Age-Appropriate Design Code Act \(CAADCA\)](#) are among the legislative measures designed to limit addictive social media features for children. Additionally, Tennessee has enacted the [Protecting Children from Social Media Act](#). That bill requires parental consent for social media account creation by minors.

Social media companies have strongly resisted these laws, often suing to block them. The letter says this highlights the need for federal legislation, as a coordinated national response is essential to addressing the issue.

Local legislative measures face opposition from free-speech advocates, who argue such regulations could violate constitutional rights. They claim the government is moving too quickly, imposing restrictions without fully considering the potential benefits of social media for youth. Some of these groups have also criticized the proposal for social media warning labels, calling it unnecessary or premature.

### **Bipartisan Momentum in Congress**

The attorneys general praised recent bipartisan efforts in Congress, specifically the passage of the [Kids Online Safety Act](#) and the [Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act](#). Both pieces of legislation appear to signal a growing consensus among lawmakers on the need to safeguard children from the harmful effects of social media.

The letter concludes with a strong call for congressional action, stating:

The social media platforms have demonstrated an unwillingness to fix the problem on their own. Therefore, we urge Congress to act by requiring warnings on algorithm-driven social media platforms.

The group of attorneys general has pledged to continue collaborating with Congress.

### **Murthy's Calls**

In June, Dr. Vivek Murthy called on Congress to require warning labels on social media platforms. In [an opinion piece](#) published in *The New York Times*, Murthy compared the mental-health risks associated with social media use to the dangers of tobacco. He proposed adding warning labels, similar to those on cigarette packs, to social media platforms. These labels would alert users, especially adolescents, to potential mental-health risks. The goal is to raise awareness of the dangers tied to excessive social media use, said Murthy.

Last May, Murthy issued [an advisory](#) in which he highlighted the growing risks social media poses to the mental health of children and adolescents. The advisory called for urgent action from policymakers, technology companies, families, and young people to create safer digital environments.

**Critics**

Several free-speech advocacy groups have voiced concerns about regulations limiting children's access to social media or imposing warning labels. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression ([FIRE](#)) argues that such regulations could infringe on First Amendment rights. FIRE contends that government efforts to regulate or restrict social media could set a dangerous precedent for free expression. They stress that while protecting youth is important, regulations should not compromise free-speech principles. Those included the editorial discretion of social media platforms.

In addition to FIRE, tech industry groups such as [NetChoice](#) and the [Computer & Communications Industry Association](#) (CCIA) have also opposed these regulations. They argue that the proposed laws could result in unconstitutional censorship, with government overreach into private companies' content moderation practices. Notably, however, social media giants such as [Meta](#) and [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) appear to have strong military and intelligence ties that have influenced the growth of these platforms. The latter readily engage in censorship on the government's behalf, as reported by [The New American](#).

**Real Solution**

While social media undeniably contributes to the mental-health crisis among youth, the solution isn't more government regulation. Imposing warning labels or stricter laws may help raise awareness, but true change begins at home. Families play a pivotal role in establishing balanced digital habits and promoting meaningful offline activities.

Ultimately, instead of relying on regulations, we should focus on strengthening family connections and promoting real-world engagement. This approach offers a more lasting solution, empowering children to navigate the digital world responsibly without sacrificing their well-being or freedom.



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