

OHIO FRATERNAL ORDER of POLICE

Proponent Testimony HB222

Members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 266. I am Lt. Brian Steel, I am here representing the Ohio Fraternal Order of Police. The FOP of Ohio is in strong support of HB 226 which would require parental approval and age verification at the app store level. I have already provided testimony in favor of this policy before the House Finance Committee, and I'm here today to emphasize why this legislation is critically important from a law enforcement perspective.

We support this legislation for three key reasons: it addresses a serious public safety problem we face daily, it provides a practical solution that strengthens parental authority, and it has overwhelming support from Ohio families. A recent survey shows that 80% of Ohio parent voters support requiring app stores to obtain parental approval for children to download apps, with strong bipartisan backing across party lines. It's what parents are asking for – making this law all the more likely to be successfully implemented.

As law enforcement officers, we see the dangers that unrestricted social media access poses to our youth. Far too often are cases involving predators who target children through online platforms. These criminals exploit the current fragmented system of age verification to gain access to minors. Many of these predators know

exactly how to manipulate the current systems better than parents do.

When we investigate these cases, we consistently find that children were able to create accounts on platforms they shouldn't have been on in the first place. The current patchwork of verification measures simply doesn't work. It creates gaps in protections and predators know they can exploit parent's and law enforcement's struggle to keep up. Stronger preventative measures are desperately needed.

Let me walk you through what typically happens today versus what would happen with app store verification. Currently, a 12-year-old can easily download Instagram or Snapchat by simply clicking "Yes, I'm 13 or older" when prompted. There's no real verification. Then they create an account using any email address, often one their parents don't even know about. Within minutes, they're on platforms designed for older users, potentially connecting with anyone in the world. Parents often have no idea this has happened until problems arise.

Now compare that to what would happen with app store parental controls: That same 12-year-old tries to download a social media app, but instead of being asked to self-verify their age, the system recognizes the device is registered to a minor. It automatically sends a notification to the parent's phone asking for approval. The parent can deny the download or approve it if they feel their child is ready.

There's no easy workaround, no simple lie to bypass the system. This creates a real checkpoint where parents can make informed decisions about their child's online presence before problems occur, not after.

The solution is straightforward and exactly what parents want. It creates a single, strong checkpoint that's much harder to bypass than the current system. App stores already have the technology to link family accounts and require approval for purchases. Extending this to app store downloads is a common-sense step that would immediately improve child safety online.

This isn't just a law enforcement priority - it's what Ohio parents overwhelmingly want. A recent survey report shows that 700 Ohio parent voters shows that 80% support a law requiring app stores to obtain parental approval for children to download apps. Half of all parents strongly support it, and 72% say it would be easier to provide approval in one place through the app store rather than separately through each app.

While public approval isn't everything, policy is much more likely to be successful and simpler to enforce when it has broad public support. This is something we see in policing everyday.

This approach gives parents the real control they're asking for without creating burdensome regulations or costly new programs. It's the kind of direct, effective measure that we in law enforcement appreciate - it addresses the problem at its source and doesn't just treat the symptoms after harm has already occurred.

When 4 out of 5 Ohio parents support this policy across party lines, it's a no-brainer. By giving parents a say in what their teens are doing online and when they're ready to access certain apps, we would see fewer cases of online predation, cyberbullying, and exploitation.

As officers who have sworn to protect and serve, we believe this measure represents a practical, effective approach to a serious problem that has overwhelming support from the families we serve. We're not interested in flashy programs or complex regulations - we want solutions that work and that parents actually want. App store parental approval is exactly that kind of solution. This reinforces parents as the first line of defense in protecting their children, a principle that aligns with effective community policing and reflects the clear will of Ohio's families.

The Ohio Fraternal Order of Police strongly urges you to pass HB 226. With 80% of Ohio parents supporting this measure, it's time to give parents and law enforcement the tools we need to keep Ohio's children safe from online predators.

Thank you for your consideration.