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United States

May 28, 2025

Ohio House Judiciary Committee  
Ohio State House  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here.

My name is Jennifer Hanley, and I am Meta's head of North American Safety Policy. I've spent the bulk of my career focused on online safety issues including more than a decade with the Family Online Safety Institute prior to joining Meta six years ago. I'm also a mom of two young boys.

We are here because Meta supports Ohio HB 226, which requires app stores to age verify and obtain a parent's permission any time their teen wants to download an app.

This solution to age verification online has already been formally introduced in 19 states – representing one-third of the nation – as well as at the federal level, and has been signed into law in Utah and is on Governor Abbott's desk in Texas. Further, this is what parents want: A recent poll found that [80%](#) of Ohioan parents—across political and ideological spectrums support app-store legislation that would require parental approval for children to download apps. The broad support of parents and lawmakers across political and ideological spectrums should not be ignored.

Here at Meta, we want to support parents so that they feel empowered to support their teens when it comes to their online experiences. And that's why in 2024, we launched *Teen Accounts*, a fundamentally reimagined experience for young people. Specifically, Instagram Teen Accounts default teens into private accounts, our

strictest messaging and content restrictions, a Sleep Mode feature which mutes notifications at night, as well as additional parental supervision tools that allow them to decide when and for how long their teens can use our services.

All teens under 18 default into Teen Accounts, and teens under 16 require a parent's permission to change any of these settings to be less strict.

But, understanding one's age is fundamental to our ability to place them in age-appropriate experiences.

And as you're aware, understanding someone's age online is a complex, industry-wide challenge because many people, including young people, may misrepresent how old they are online.

And while *Meta* has a multi-layered approach to determining age -- we are only one part of the online ecosystem. The reality is that kids are getting smartphones at increasingly younger ages and they hop from app to app to app. It is estimated that teens are on an average of 40 apps per week. That's A LOT of apps for parents to keep tabs on.

We believe the easiest, most consistent, and most privacy-protective solution is to require app stores to verify ages and get a parent's approval any time their teen wants to download an app.

This is how it would work: When a parent gets their teen a smartphone or device and sets up their app store account for the first time, the parent can go into their own Apple or Google account, add their teen's profile, and confirm 1) they are the parent or guardian, and 2) the teen's age.

And parents will only have to do this once -- rather than providing personal information to each of the 40+ apps their teens use one-by-one. Then, when a teen tries to download an app on their smartphone or device, the parent would receive a request on their phone to either approve or deny it. The app wouldn't download unless the parent approves, putting parents in control.

And even better: we don't have to start from scratch. Apple and Google already collect this information when a parent buys and sets up their teen's phone, and they already have the infrastructure in place to get parent approval in this exact way, before teens can make in-app purchases. The differences here are that 1) parental approval would be required for all app downloads, not just the ones you have to buy; and, 2) the parent-provided age range and affirmative consent would be shared with individual apps before downloading, so that apps can ensure teens are placed in age-appropriate, supervised experiences when available – *like Teen Accounts*.

HB 226 supports families by creating a *one-stop-shop* for parents to verify age; reduces privacy risks and opportunities for identity theft, phishing scams, and data breaches associated with sharing personal information to verify age across multiple platforms with varying requirements; and creates consistent protections for teens across the entire online ecosystem.

In conclusion, we are all here today because we all care about protecting teens online and it is our collective responsibility. Not just on a handful of apps, but across the entire online ecosystem. And every single proposal in doing so requires applications to know the age of users. We respectfully ask the Committee to pass HB 226 which would achieve this industrywide, can be easily implemented, and will have an immediate impact.

Jennifer Hanley  
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Meta