

OHIO'S VOICE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION



Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance and Technology Committee SB167 Proponent Testimony

October 14, 2025

4:00 p.m.

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance, and Technology Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of SB167 which would require app stores to verify with parents the age of children who access apps on their phones and tablets and approve the download of social media and other apps.

My name is Tony Coder and I am the CEO of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, a non-profit focused on breaking stigma around suicide, but also providing strategies for communities, individuals and families to improve opportunities for mental health wellness.

Youth suicide is a critical issue in communities across Ohio. Approximately 1 in 5 youth experience a mental health condition each year and this significantly impacts their ability to learn and succeed in school, build healthy potential and reach their full potential. Bullying and cyberbullying, as well as issues such as sextortion can be a major contributor to a child's mental health problems, with young people experiencing higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.

A 2025 report from the US Department of Health and Human Services reports up to 95% of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media “almost constantly.” Although age 13 is commonly the required minimum age used by social media platforms in the U.S., nearly 40% of children ages 8–12 use social

media., Further, a former US Surgeon General's report goes on to state that a longitudinal study showed that youth ages 12-15 who use social media three hours a day or longer more than double their risk of poor mental health, including symptoms of depression and anxiety. Compared to the fact that 8th-10th graders usually spend 3.5 hours per day on social media, one can see that this can add up to real issues for young people.

We lose a young person to suicide every 34 hours in the State of Ohio and meeting with and working with families who have lost a child is truly humbling. Over the past seven years, I have learned that there is nothing that I can say to make their life any better. I can give no advice to take away their pain and I have no words of wisdom to lessen suffering with the loss of a child. One such family that OSPF works with is a young man who was bullied at school to the point where he could not even feel comfortable in the lunchroom to eat lunch, so, according to his mom, he had to go to the music room to eat his lunch in peace. He would then go home, and through his Instagram, the bullying would continue. Until one night, when he was just 15 years old, he reached out on Instagram to the world with a statement, "I will give everyone 30 minutes to let me know that they care" – reaching out to someone to be a friend, to give him one work of hope, but not one person answered and that evening which was also his mom's birthday, that young man took his life. This mother told me she didn't even know he was on Instagram, so it was surprising when a classmate's parent informed her of the social media post. As I have said, there are no words that I can give her that lessens her suffering, but we can do things like pass this commonsense piece of legislation that SB167 offers.

I call this a commonsense piece of legislation as I want to make sure that we are not just making social media an enemy – social media can provide connections with others, create learning opportunities, and raise awareness of critical issues that impact young people. We don't need to go as far as Australia which has banned all social media for children under 16 because of mental health concerns, but we can and should give parents the ability to understand what their young children are seeing and whom they are interacting with. Just last year, we gathered ten groups of high-school youth from across Ohio to learn more about their thoughts around mental health. We were somewhat surprised to learn of their concern for what social media is doing to themselves and their friends. This came from the mouths of those who are being impacted the most.

Having age verification and parental consent at the app-store level allows a much less confusing process for a parent to protect their children under 16 from the dangers of social media. It also gives parents a chance to have conversations with young people about social media, their use, the impact of social media on mental health, and safeguards if they are approached online or start to see changes in their kids while using social media.

As OSPF has been active in advocating on the dangers of unchecked social media use on young people, I have heard a common question – aren't you afraid that app stores will just lobby to get this bill shut down. Being a parent of a 16 year old, I am also urging from a personal level. I am very involved in my son's life – I coach his baseball team, helped him get his private pilot's license and try to teach him to the best of my ability lessons of life. Yet, nearly every week, he tells me about a new social media app or something going on in social media that I've never heard of. Give parents a chance and choose Ohio's children over the interests of app stores and their profit margins.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today about this opportunity to improve youth mental health by allowing parents to be an active participant in their child's social media use and ask that you pass SB167 to give parents an opportunity to protect their children in this very important public health issue.