
Prevention Action Alliance

Lifetime Prevention | Lifetime Wellness

Senate Bill 167

Ohio Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance and Technology Committee

Prevention Action Alliance

October 14, 2025

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Financial Institution, Insurance and Technology Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 167. My name is Frances Gerbig, and I am the Executive Director of Prevention Action Alliance (PAA). PAA is a statewide nonprofit prevention agency based in Columbus, Ohio and has been in existence for over thirty years. Prevention Action Alliance is dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Our organization offers an abundance of resources, training services, grants, and advocacy opportunities for those who are active in the prevention and mental health fields. The Prevention Action Alliance organization and its staff actively participate in numerous advisory committees, boards, and membership organizations. These include esteemed groups such as the RecoveryOhio Advisory Council, the Great Lakes Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC) Network, the Coalition for Healthy Communities, the Chemical Dependency Professionals Board, and the Ohio Prevention Professionals Association.

At Prevention Action Alliance, our mission is rooted in evidence-based science and prevention. We believe in addressing issues at the root of the problem while also supporting downstream solutions. That's the foundation of effective public health and it is exactly what Senate Bill 167, the App Store Accountability Act, seeks to do in the digital space.

Every day, we see the connection between what young people experience online and their mental health and wellbeing. What children see, hear, and engage with online can shape their emotions, choices, and self-worth in profound ways. Parents often don't realize the extent of that influence until it's too late—until a crisis happens. That's not a failure of parenting. It's a failure of the systems that surround them.

In 2023 and 2024 we partnered with Olentangy High School students to support their initiative called "In 27 Minutes, Everything Can Change." On October 17, 2021, Braden Markus, a 15-year-old, was targeted on social media by a predator. After images were sent to whom he believed to be a teenage girl, it quickly turned into extortion. The predators threatened to post the pictures unless Braden paid them \$1800. The messages continued back and forth for 27 minutes and resulted in Braden feeling so helpless that he took his own life. This series highlighted by Braden's peers documented that in just 27 minutes, lives can be drastically altered forever. This campaign challenged parents, educators, and communities to use that same window of time to *start a conversation* with their children about digital safety, mental health, and risky behaviors.

Senate Bill 167 creates exactly that kind of opportunity. It gives parents a natural moment to pause and engage; to ask questions and make informed decisions before a child downloads an app. When a parent receives a notification about an app their child wants, it opens the door for a conversation. It gives parents the ability to guide, not just react. Senate Bill 167 is different, because it centralizes age verification at the app store level at one secure point. Young people aren't scattering their personal information across the internet every time they want to download something.

Other proposals to regulate online safety rely on individual age verification across multiple apps, browsers, and platforms. That approach risks creating a massive digital trail of sensitive data about minors; data that can be misused or exploited. Senate Bill 167 takes a smarter path. It centralizes age verification at the app store level one secure checkpoint. This reduces the risk and strengthens family oversight.

We know from decades of prevention science that parental engagement is a strong protective factor for young people¹. Parents, not tech companies or government agencies, are best positioned to keep their children safe. But they need simple, effective tools to do so. Complex systems that overwhelm families don't work. Systems that introduce new risks while claiming to solve old ones don't work. Prevention works when it's practical, sustainable, and rooted in human connection.

Senate Bill 167 won't solve every problem online, but it represents meaningful prevention. It creates a moment for engagement, supports informed decision-making, and limits privacy risks for children and families. It turns that critical 27-minute window into a chance for protection and prevention, not harm.

Thank you, Chair Wilson, Vice-Chair Lang, and Ranking Member Craig and members of the Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance and Technology Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 167. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information. Please feel free to contact me at fgerbig@preventionactionalliance.org.

¹ <https://www.theharriscenter.org/blogs/breaking-cycle-empowering-parents-prevent-substance-abuse-their-children>