

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Craig, 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 nearly seven years ago. I'm also a mom of two young boys.

We are here because Meta supports Ohio SB 167, which requires app stores to age verify and obtain a parent's permission any time their teen wants to download an app, so that app developers, like Meta, can place younger users into age-appropriate experiences on our platforms. This approach is built on a simple but powerful idea: protecting teens online is a shared responsibility, and no one gets a free pass.

The app store solution to age verification online has already been formally introduced in 20 states including Ohio – more than one-third of the nation – as well as at the federal level – and has been signed into law in Utah, Texas, Louisiana, and over the weekend, California. Further, **this is what parents want:** A recent poll found that [80%](#) of Ohio 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.

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 is why in 2024, we launched Teen Accounts, a fundamentally reimagined experience for young people. Teens under 18 are automatically defaulted into Teen accounts, and teens under 16 require a parent's permission to change any of the settings to be less strict.

It is critical to remember that in order to place teens into age-appropriate experiences online, apps must know who is and is not a teen. Period.

If the goal is to keep teens safer online – no matter the proposal – selective age verification on some services, and not others, *will fail*. This is because teens will simply flock to different or new services that are out-of-scope, have less friction, and likely don't offer protections. Moreover, singling-out some *but not all* apps for age verification is unlikely to pass constitutional muster, as shown by the regulatory models being successfully challenged in courts, like the law recently enjoined in Ohio.

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 use an estimated average of **40 apps per week**. Without a centralized solution to age verification within the app store, parents would have to share personal information with *each* of these independent apps in order to provide *consistently safer* experiences for teens across the online ecosystem. This would be a parenting – *and a privacy* – nightmare.

### **SB 167 is a better way.**

This is how it would work: When a parent gets their teen a smartphone or device and sets up the teen's app store account for the first time, the parent would link their teen's app store account to their own, 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 to establish age and parental relationship. Then, when a teen tries to download an app, the parent would receive a request on their own phone to either approve or deny it *with the simple click of a button*. The app wouldn't download unless the parent approves, **putting parents in control**. A singular approval dashboard could empower parents to help guide their child's digital journey without being overwhelmed by independent age verification and consent processes within all the different apps that teens want to use.

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 Apple and Google already have systems in place to obtain parental approval before teens can purchase an app for download. App stores could use this existing infrastructure and apply this exact mechanism to obtain parental approval for *all app downloads*, not just the ones that cost money. Interestingly, Apple and Google just announced their compliance plans for the Texas app store law, proving the point that this can be done.

Let me be clear: with an app store approach like SB 167, no sensitive personal information would be shared with any app developer. App stores would only be required to share secure *age range and consent signals* with parent-approved apps so that teens can be automatically placed in age-appropriate experiences upon download. And because age would only be checked once, SB 167 minimizes data exposure and risks of identity theft and phishing associated with uploading personal documentation to verify age on different services across the internet.

Lastly, SB 167 does not absolve social media platforms of responsibility; **it shares responsibility across those best positioned to keep teens safe online** and creates a unified, effective system that reduces loopholes and the risk of teens who may lie about their age.

While app stores would be responsible for age verification and parental consent to download apps, under SB 167, app developers, including social media companies, would be required to create experiences tailored to different age groups. And since app developers would be able to rely on the *parent-provided age signal* transmitted from the app store, app developers – including social media companies – will be able to place teens more effectively into these age-appropriate experiences, like Teen Accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger.

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. We respectfully ask the Committee to pass SB 167 which would achieve this industrywide, can be easily implemented, and will have an immediate impact to help families.