

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL ONLINE MATERIAL

General Description:

This concurrent resolution of the Legislature and the Governor recognizes that application (app) age ratings and descriptions are sometimes inaccurate and fail to sufficiently warn parents of the risks inherent therein. It recognizes that there is no independent organization holding technology companies responsible for the content posted on their apps. It also recognizes that provided parental controls within apps and Internet-ready devices are often insufficient, ignore a child's age, contain loopholes, and are difficult to implement. As a result, children are left unprotected.

Highlighted Provisions:

This resolution:

- Asks that technology and app companies establish a third-party organization comprised of child development, child protection, and Internet safety subject matter experts to assign app ratings and descriptions and be vested with the power to impose sanctions for non-compliance, similar to what the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) does for video games or the Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA) does for movies.
- Asks that parental controls on Internet-ready devices (such as iPhones, Android devices, and Chromebooks) be simplified, circumvention loopholes closed, age-based safety-settings be built-in, and selective app shutoff be added for bedtime and school hours.

Be it resolved by the Legislature of the State of Utah, the Governor concurring therein:

WHEREAS, millions of children use electronic devices daily;

WHEREAS, popular apps often include content that is not consistent with their age rating or app description; ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

WHEREAS, no third-party organization is holding app developers accountable to ensure that app ratings are accurate and app descriptions adequately explain the content and advertising available to children therein;

WHEREAS, no third-party organization has the authority to impose sanctions for non-disclosure related to app content and advertising;

WHEREAS, the parental controls provided on Internet-ready devices are often insufficient, difficult to setup, and contain loopholes leaving children unprotected; ⁽³⁾

WHEREAS, popular apps often do not include or have inadequate parental controls;

WHEREAS, the improper use of devices during school hours contributes to student distraction and lower test scores; ⁽⁴⁾

WHEREAS, the use of devices during bedtime hours can lead to sleep disturbance; ⁽⁵⁾

WHEREAS, recent studies indicate that excessive use of social media, particularly in young girls, can lead to an increase in depressive symptoms; ^{(6) (7)}

WHEREAS, an increase in suicide rates among US teens has occurred at the same time that social media use has surged within the same age group; ⁽⁸⁾

WHEREAS, social media is increasingly being used to recruit and sexually exploit children; ^{(9) (10)}

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature and the Governor call on technology and app companies to establish a third-party organization, comprised of child development, child protection, and Internet safety subject matter experts to assign app ratings and descriptions, and be vested with the power to impose sanctions for non-compliance similar to what the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) does for video games or the Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA) does for movies; for Internet-ready devices (such as iPhones, Android devices, and Chromebooks) to be sold with user-friendly parental controls, for circumvention loopholes to be closed, for age-based safety-settings to be built-in, and for selective app shutoff to be added for bedtime and school hours.

For more information go to fixappratings.com.

References:

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- (10) NSPCC News. (March 1, 2019). Over 5,000 online grooming offences recorded in 18 months [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/news-opinion/over-5000-grooming-offences-recorded-18-months/>