

Children and Youth Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
March 27, 2024

Intro: Our Commitment to Pennsylvania

Good morning, Chair Bullock and members of the Committee—and thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Kate Charlet and I am Director for Privacy, Safety and Security on Google’s Government Affairs and Public Policy team.

Google is deeply committed to Pennsylvania, and with an office in Pittsburgh, we have been proud to call the state “home” for over a decade. In 2022, the last year for which figures are available, Google helped provide \$16.95 billion of economic activity for tens of thousands of Pennsylvania businesses, publishers, nonprofits, creators and developers. The Grow with Google initiative has partnered with 376 organizations in the state to train more than 380,000 Pennsylvanians on digital skills, including organizations such as public libraries, chambers of commerce, community colleges and more.

Our commitment to the Keystone State extends to its children and youth. Earlier this month, we were pleased to bring our Online Safety Roadshow to Pennsylvania, with stops at four public middle schools across the state. Over the course of the week, we had the opportunity to speak with over 1000 students about how to navigate online safety in the digital age. We were proud to host Representative Burgos and Senator Pittman at shows in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, respectively.

And Google has been grateful to partner with you as you consider important legislation to advance our shared priority of children’s privacy and safety online. These are issues we care deeply about, and want to be constructive partners. We appreciate Chair Bullock’s leadership on this issue and believe the Online Safety Protection Act is the best approach in the Pennsylvania legislature and is among the best in the country.

Privacy and Safety for Kids and Teens: Google’s Approach

Today’s children and teens are growing up in an increasingly digital world, with digital tools and experiences a foundational part of their everyday lives. Over the years, we have seen how innovative technologies and access to high-quality, diverse content can yield enormous

benefits. We believe that the appropriate safeguards can empower young people and help them learn, connect, grow, and prepare for the future.

At Google, we have some of the most helpful and powerful tools for safer online exploration at school, at home, or anywhere in between—like Google Search, YouTube, Google Kids Space, Assistant, and Play. Just a click, tap, or “Hey Google” can turn curiosity into passion, communication into connection, play time into learning time, and “what if” into “what’s next.”

Online services need to deliver age-appropriate features and services and to be designed with safety in mind. Our products and policies are designed to help protect children from abuse online, filter inappropriate or harmful content, and keep their data and accounts private and secure. We work to develop age-appropriate products that align with childrens’ developmental stages and needs, offer tools that give families flexibility to manage their unique relationships with technology, and implement policies, protections, and programs that help keep children and youth safer online. Examples of this include expanding options for parents in Family Link, not personalizing advertising to children and teens, blurring adult or graphic violent content in Search results by default, or setting defaults that support digital wellbeing. We are committed to continuing this work with input from diverse stakeholders.

Legislative Initiatives

We support regulatory approaches that promote both online safety and balanced practices. For example, last year we introduced our [Legislative Framework to Protect Children and Teens Online](#). The Framework sets forth principles for laws seeking to improve online experiences for children and teens and is designed to help advance the work of the policymakers and experts addressing these important issues.

Well-crafted legislation can be an effective tool to build on companies’ efforts to keep children and teens safer online. In particular, we support legislation that tailors protections to the age of the child, supports mental health and wellbeing, tackles different risks with proportional responses, and gives space for product and business improvements. In our Framework we share our support for legislation that, among other things:

- Requires online services to assess the collective interests of children to ensure that they are developing, designing and offering age-appropriate products and services geared to the best interests of children and teens;
- Bans personalized advertising for children and teens, as well as the sale of their personal information;
- Uses risk or impact assessments that evaluate how a service processes the data of children and teens and prioritizes their best interests to foster accountability; and
- Permits but does not require age assurance to protect users’ privacy and adults’ access to content.

Online Safety Protection Act

We appreciate our engagement with members of this Committee and are pleased to support the Online Safety Protection Act. This bill is based on age-appropriate design principles that require a holistic understanding of risks and benefits and a plan to mitigate them.

- At the core of this approach is the concept of respecting and balancing kids and teens' needs for safety, health, wellbeing, family relationships, physical, psychological and emotional development, freedom of expression, and privacy – all the things we can all agree enable a child to thrive and all reflected in US law, including the Constitution.
- The Online Safety Protection Act puts strong safeguards in place that protect children and teens, empowers parents, and holds companies accountable. It enables companies to treat kids like kids, teens like teens, and adults like adults. This means providing experiences tailored to the age, development, and best interests of the child.
- The bill takes a risk-based approach with a workable baseline of protections backed by accountability and regulatory oversight. And it allows flexibility for families to make the decisions that suit them.
- This approach is in line with a recent Surgeon General [report](#). Specifically, the Advisory recommends that technology companies conduct assessments of the impact of their products on children and adolescents, and prioritize user health and safety in the design and development of their products and services.
- This approach gives clear rules of the road while providing flexibility and holding providers accountable for their actions, all without deterring innovation, risking access or driving users to less protective parts of the web.

As the Committee is aware, we have concerns with the 60 day implementation time frame contemplated by the current draft language. We share this body's commitment to protecting children and teens online and urge the sponsor to ensure covered entities have the time required to get compliance right.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions and continuing to work together on child safety.