

Ellen Coughlin-Quinn
Scarborough
LD 844

To the Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ellen Coughlin-Quinn, and I am a parent of three children—a 9-year-old, a 7-year-old, and a 5-year-old. I am writing to express my strong support for “An Act to Regulate Social Media Use by Minors Under 16 Years of Age.” As a parent, I’ve seen firsthand how difficult it is to navigate the complex and often harmful landscape of social media, and I believe this legislation is a necessary step toward protecting the mental health and well-being of our children.

This is not just a parenting problem—it’s a collective action problem. I can say “no” to my child when they ask for a social media account, and I often do. But the reality is that saying “no” only goes so far when social media has become a pervasive part of the social fabric for young people. If other kids are on social media, my child is left out—left out of conversations, left out of social plans, left out of the very real social currency that these platforms have created. The pressure to participate is immense, and without collective action, individual parental decisions are undermined by the broader social environment. This bill would help level the playing field, ensuring that minors under 16 are not prematurely exposed to the harmful effects of social media before they have the emotional maturity to manage them.

The negative effects of social media on young people are well-documented and alarming. Studies have linked social media use to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem among teenagers and preteens. The constant comparison to carefully curated, unrealistic portrayals of other people’s lives fuels feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. Cyberbullying has become rampant, with social media providing a platform for anonymous and relentless harassment. Sleep deprivation is also a major concern, as children stay up late scrolling through feeds, leading to diminished academic performance and mental health struggles.

Perhaps most concerning is the addictive nature of these platforms. Social media companies design their apps using algorithms and psychological triggers that keep kids hooked—rewarding them with likes, comments, and notifications that stimulate dopamine responses in the brain. This is not a fair fight. We are asking children to resist technology that has been engineered to exploit their developing brains, and then wondering why they struggle with self-regulation.

As a parent, I know that raising children in the digital age is challenging enough without fighting against the structural forces that make social media omnipresent. This bill provides a crucial safeguard by ensuring that minors under 16 are not prematurely subjected to these pressures. It gives parents like me the backing we need to set limits, while also removing the social penalty for not participating. If no one under 16 is on social media, the fear of missing out disappears, and our kids can reclaim the ability to develop social connections and self-worth in healthier, more meaningful ways.

This is not about cutting kids off from the modern world—it’s about giving them the time and space to grow up without the distortions and pressures that social media creates. Childhood and adolescence are critical periods for emotional and social development. By delaying access to social media until kids are better equipped to handle it, we are giving them the gift of a more balanced, less anxious, and more authentic childhood.

I urge you to support “An Act to Regulate Social Media Use by Minors Under 16 Years of Age.” This is an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of young people and to give parents the collective support we need to protect our children from harm.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ellen Coughlin-Quinn
Scarborough, Maine