

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Legislative Solutions to Protect Children and Teens Online”

December 2, 2025

Today we are discussing the important topic of youth online safety. As more of our lives are lived online, there have been tremendous changes in how we communicate, socialize, and learn. With these changes come new challenges to ensuring the health and well-being of all Americans, but particularly our youngest and most vulnerable.

We can all agree that we want our kids and teens to be safe online. Congress, along with parents, educators, and states, can and should play an active role in keeping minors safe. And that role must include prioritizing strong, comprehensive data privacy legislation, which unfortunately is not included in the 19 bills we are considering today. Comprehensive data privacy legislation is something I’ve cared about for years.

In the absence of data privacy legislation, companies will continue to collect, process, and sell as much of our data – and the data of our kids – as possible. This data allows companies to exploit human psychology and individual preferences to fuel invasive ads and design features – without regard to the harm suffered by those still developing critical thinking and judgment. Artificial intelligence is only accelerating existing incentives, because like social media, AI relies on the exploitation of our data.

Without such a strong legislative solution for children, teens, and all Americans, we must recognize that the measures we take in Congress will not address the full scope of the problems perpetrated by an online ecosystem fundamentally built on reckless and abusive data practices. We can and should do more for our children, and for all consumers.

But if comprehensive privacy legislation was easy, it would already be law. And the urgency of addressing harms to children and teens presents an opportunity to make progress towards ensuring the internet is a safer place for all Americans.

This is why I am pleased we will be discussing my bill that will prevent shadowy data brokers from selling minors’ data and allow parents and teens to request the deletion of any data already in the hands of brokers. We simply should not allow nameless data harvesters to profit off of our kids’ data. Our kids deserve the right to enter adulthood with a clean slate, not a detailed dossier that will follow them throughout their adult lives.

They also deserve online safety legislation that will make the internet safer – not put their data and physical safety more at risk. I am concerned that mandating third party access to children’s data and requiring additional collection and sharing of sensitive data before accessing content, sending a message, or downloading an app would move us in the wrong

direction in the fight for online privacy. Congress must also remember that unfortunately many kids find themselves in unsupportive or even abusive or neglectful households. There can be real world harms from allowing parents complete access and control over their teens' existence online.

Instead of shifting ever more burden onto parents and teens, and putting ever more trust in tech companies, we can give everyone safer defaults and more control over their digital lives. We can also require companies to evaluate their algorithms for bias and harms before making our kids the guinea pigs. We can resist efforts to preempt existing protections and let states continue to respond to rapidly evolving technologies, like AI chatbots, and enforce their existing child safety and privacy laws. And we can all stand up for an independent Federal Trade Commission.

The FTC, under both Republican and Democratic leadership, has consistently been Americans' strongest champion against the abuses of all who seek to exploit our nation's children and adults for profit both on and offline. When President Trump attempted to illegally fire the FTC's Democratic commissioners, he made our children less safe online. If my Republican colleagues want to further empower the FTC to protect kids and teens, they must join Democrats in standing up for a bipartisan and independent FTC. They should join us in demanding that the Democratic commissioners be reinstated.

I look forward to the discussion today on this important issue and I yield back the balance of my time.