



April 9, 2026

The Honorable Rebecca Bauer-Kahan
Chair, Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection Committee
1020 N Street, Room 162
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: A.B. 1709 – Oppose

Dear Chair Bauer-Kahan:

The undersigned organizations write today in strong opposition to A.B. 1709, which would prohibit all Californians under the age of 16 from accessing social media platforms. The bill violates young people’s First Amendment rights to speak and get information online. And in the process, the bill also burdens adults’ free speech rights, inhibits people’s rights to anonymity online, and jeopardizes everyone’s privacy and data security. It also removes power from parents and young people to decide for themselves whether to use social media and jeopardizes young people’s wellbeing. Lawmakers must not sacrifice their constituents’ First Amendment and privacy rights, and should instead be working on constitutional measures to help young people use the internet safely.

Banning Youth From Social Media is Unconstitutional

First, [there is no “kid exception” to the First Amendment](#). Just like adults, young people enjoy First Amendment rights to speak and to access speech on social media. Indeed, courts across the country have [struck down](#) laws banning young people from social media, ruling that the laws violate both young people’s and adults’ First Amendment rights. And the Supreme Court has repeatedly struck down laws that restrict minors’ speech or impose parental-permission

requirements on non-sexual content. Banning young people entirely from social media is an extreme measure that doesn't match the actual risks of online engagement. And California does not have a valid interest in overriding parents' and children's rights to decide for themselves how to use social media.

Banning Youth From Social Media is Bad Public Policy

Besides being unconstitutional, banning young people from the internet is bad public policy. While efforts like A.B. 1709 are often intended to protect youth, cutting off their online access will both [erase their important voices and perspectives](#) and frustrate their development, ability to form in-person relationships, and autonomy. After all, social media sites are not just sources of entertainment; they provide crucial spaces for young people to explore their identities—whether by creating and sharing [art](#), practicing [religion](#), community building, or [civic engagement](#).

For many young people, especially those who lack support in their physical environments, these online communities can provide meaningful connection and a sense of belonging.¹ Research has [disproven](#) the oft-assumed link between social media use and poor mental health in youth; in fact, young people actually benefit from online connection.² In one [major study](#) of 100,000 adolescents, a “U-shaped association emerged where moderate social media use was associated with the best well-being outcomes, while both no use and highest use were associated with poorer well-being.”

For LGBTQ+ youth in particular, social media provides an essential lifeline of support. A 2025 survey by The Trevor Project revealed that most LGBTQ+ young people agreed that they go online to connect with people because it is difficult finding others to relate to and connect with in their daily lives. Compared to their cisgender peers, trans and non-binary youth were more likely to agree that they go online to find others because it is hard to make in-person connections (79% vs. 65%), and because they feel they can be their complete selves online (78% vs. 64%).³

¹ See UNICEF, Statement: Age Restrictions Alone Won't Keep Children Safe Online (Dec. 10, 2025), <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/age-restrictions-alone-wont-keep-children-safe-online>; Manushya Foundation, Statement on Age-Gating Laws (Aug. 21, 2025), <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/manushya-s-statement-on-age-gating>.

² See, e.g., Mike Masnick, “Two Major Studies, 125,000 Kids: The Social Media Panic Doesn't Hold Up,” TechDirt (Jan. 21, 2026), <https://www.techdirt.com/2026/01/21/two-major-studies-125000-kids-the-social-media-panic-doesnt-hold-up/> (“For girls, moderate use became most favorable from middle adolescence onward, while for boys, no use became increasingly problematic from midadolescence, exceeding risks of high use by late adolescence.”); see also Kelsey L McAlister et al., “Social Media Use in Adolescents: Bans, Benefits, and Emotion Regulation Behaviors,” JMIR Mental Health (Nov. 4, 2024), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11554337/>.

³ Trevor Project, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/classroom/classroom-voices/student-voices/2020/11/student-voice-how-young-people-use-social-media-to-engage-civically>.

The harms of a total social media ban like A.B. 1709 are [further magnified](#) for other members of marginalized groups, including young people who are rural, homeschooled, in foster care, have a disability, or are living in an unsupportive or abusive home. Additionally, social media can be a very useful tool for adolescents to obtain factual and scientifically accurate information about a wide array of topics, including sexuality and gender identities. These resources can be particularly crucial for young people living in places where open discussions of sexuality are restricted. Finally, adolescents also face increasing obstacles to information on sex, reproductive health, and abortion services.⁴ Studies have shown that social media is the primary information source for that population.⁵

Blocking our youth from these diverse online spaces robs them of opportunities to develop as individuals and participate in public life, and to find knowledge and safety in supportive online communities that they can't always access in the physical world.

A.B. 1709 Harms the Privacy and Expressive Rights of Adults and Youth Alike

To comply with A.B. 1709, social media platforms could either implement their own [age verification systems](#) (using invasive and discriminatory methods like biometric scans, collection of government ID, and AI-based age estimation), or request users' age-bracket data from operating systems under CA A.B. 1043 (2025). Both of these options come with [a slew of privacy, security, and expressive harms](#)—not only for young people, but for adults too.

As multiple studies have shown, no method of age verification is both privacy-protective and entirely accurate; rather, each and every method endangers user data security *and* threatens access to lawful expression in some way.⁶ Many of these mandates imagine technology that [does not currently exist](#). And they are often easy to circumvent and will expose consumers to [real data breach risk](#). ID-based systems of access can lock people out if they don't have the right form of ID, and biometric systems or facial recognition scans are often discriminatory or inaccurate. All methods are [disproportionately harmful](#) to Black and Hispanic Americans, immigrants, people with disabilities, lower-income individuals, trans and gender non-conforming adults, and people with disabilities. And importantly, requiring users to identify themselves before speaking also [chills anonymous speech](#)—protected by the First Amendment, and essential for those who risk retaliation.

⁴ <https://www.woodhullfoundation.org/press-release/report-age-verification-sex-educators/>

⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1089/jwh.2024.0563>

⁶ See, e.g., Online age verification: Balancing Privacy and the Protection of Minors.

CNIL. (n.d.), <https://www.cnil.fr/en/online-age-verification-balancing-privacy-and-protection-minors>; Roadmap for age verification., (n.d.), https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/Roadmap-for-age-verification_2.pdf; Joint Statement of Security and Privacy Scientists and Researchers on Age Assurance (March 2, 2026), <https://csa-scientist-open-letter.org/ageverif-Feb2026>.

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How to Make the Internet Safer—For All Californians

The internet is an essential part of how we speak, learn, and participate in public life. Instead of cutting young people off from this crucial tool of self-discovery, we should support them as they grow into well-rounded members of adult society. Instead of broad censorship mandates like A.B. 1709, lawmakers should consider supporting: [comprehensive consumer data privacy laws](#) that would keep all of our sensitive data safe from bad actors; digital literacy education measures that would arm young people with the knowledge they need to stay safe while exploring online spaces; and public education and advocacy efforts that would help parents and teachers utilize existing tools to customize online experiences according to each young person's unique developmental needs.

For these reasons, we must respectfully oppose A.B. 1709 and respectfully urge your "no" vote. Thank you.

Signed,

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Jessica Goldberg, Associate Director of Youth Access, If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice

Amber Barcel, Director of Public Policy, Advocates for Youth

Jaelyn Friedman, Executive Director, EducateUS

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Mandy Salley, COO, Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Gabrielle Doyle, Senior Manager of State Advocacy, The Trevor Project

Shae Gardner, Director of Policy & Research, LGBT Tech

Miranda Estes, State Policy Action Manager, SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change

Meg York, Chief Legal and Policy Officer, COLAGE

cc: Honorable Members and Committee Staff, Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection Committee; Honorable Members and Committee Staff, Assembly Judiciary Committee