Woodhull Freedom Foundation

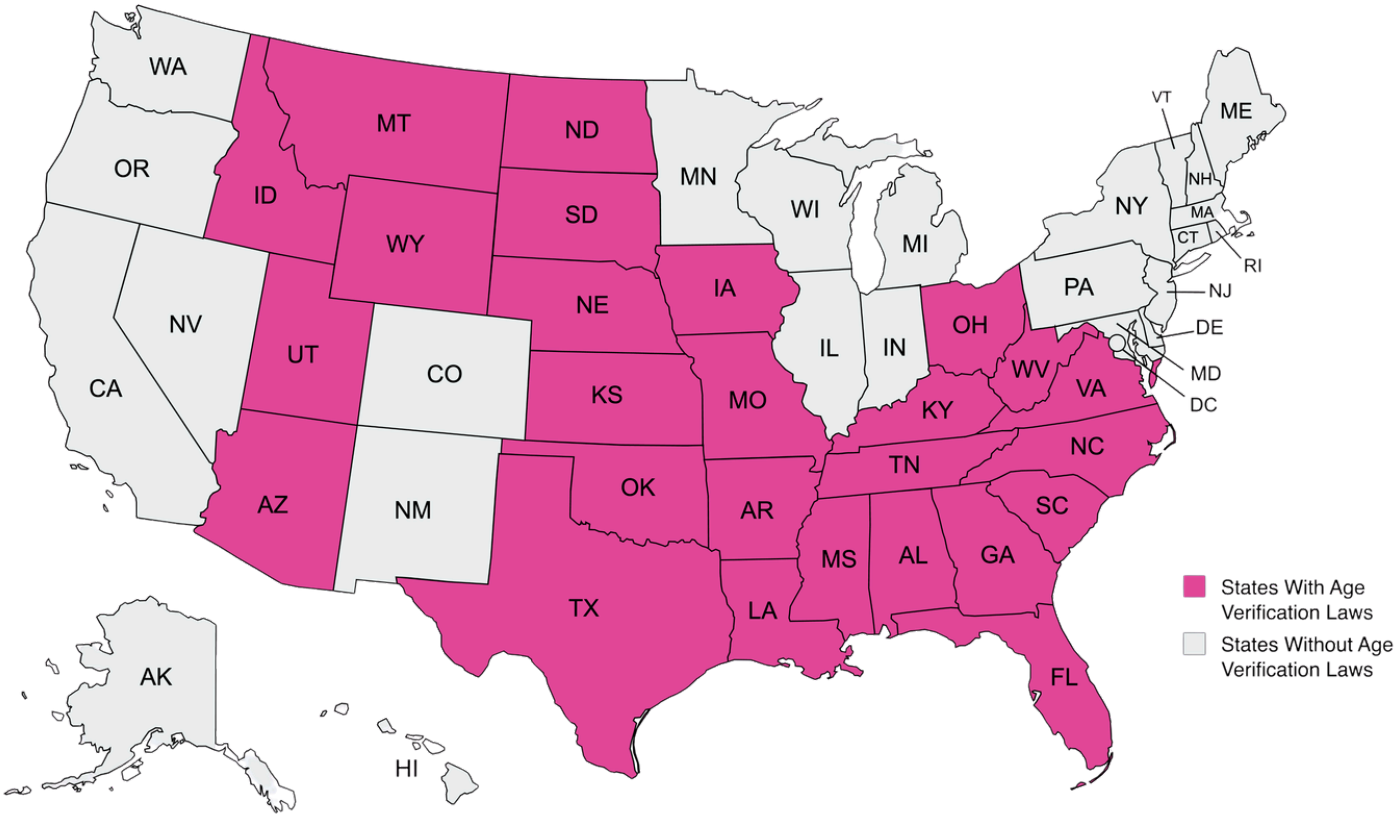
The Chilling Effect of Age Verification: What Sex Educators Are Experiencing—and What They Fear Comes Next

Why This Matters

Age verification laws are reshaping internet access as we know it, with implications that go beyond their stated goal of "protecting kids online." For sex educators, these laws raise serious concerns about their ability to share accurate sexual health information and reach those wanting to access the educational resources. Woodhull has loudly opposed these bills since they first appeared in 2022. We knew age verification laws would impede access to online information and infringe on free speech, but we hoped our concerns would be unfounded. We polled the experts to find out what, if any, impact these laws were having on their work.

We conducted this survey to better understand how age verification laws are affecting sex educators' work and to document the challenges, concerns, and potential consequences that are emerging. By asking the professionals directly, we can understand exactly how these policies are working.

Tracking Age Verification

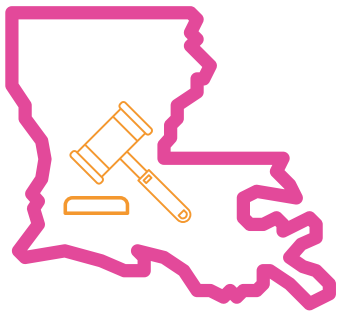


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Age verification laws have swept the nation since 2023. The map above indicates which states have an active age verification law in place. About half of United States residents are living in a state with one of these laws. We can, and did, glean a lot from asking educators nationwide about their work changed after an age verification law was signed into law in their community.

Tracking Age Verification

In 2022, Louisiana passed legislation requiring age verification on websites where at least one-third of the content is considered harmful to minors. Under the law, websites must use commercial age-verification systems that confirm users are at least 18 through government-issued identification or public or private transactional data. Since then, similar legislation has been introduced and enacted across the country, with twenty-five states requiring age verification for websites containing material deemed harmful to minors.

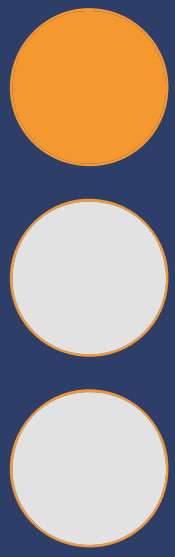


Methods

In 2026, we launched a nation-wide survey of sex educators and sexual health professionals. The survey was anonymous and 79 people responded. Respondents included professionals from various fields such as education, mental health services, research, reproductive services, wellness, and advocacy. We selected representative material from the report to share here. Some respondents opted to provide their name and photo for attribution. The results revealed a range of experiences, from concerns about barriers to educational materials, challenges with resources for professional training, and the broader implications of age verification for sexual health, freedom of expression, and access to information. The feedback has provided us with insight into the consequences of age verification laws for sex educators and the people who rely on their work.

> I am no longer able to access sexually explicit materials, even documentaries, for the purpose of teaching adults. My own website may be restricted, I am not positive. This means that fewer medical professionals, therapists, educators and others are unable to get the training they need in human sexual concerns.
>
> -A.B., Sex Educator

One-third of sex educators and sexual health professionals surveyed said they have had to change their practice in response to these laws.



> Professionals seeking out credible, reliable, and evidence-based information are unable to find that information, which means that youth are also unable to find that information and more prone to misinformation.
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> -Courtney Bramstedt, Sexual Assault Counselor & Sexual Educator

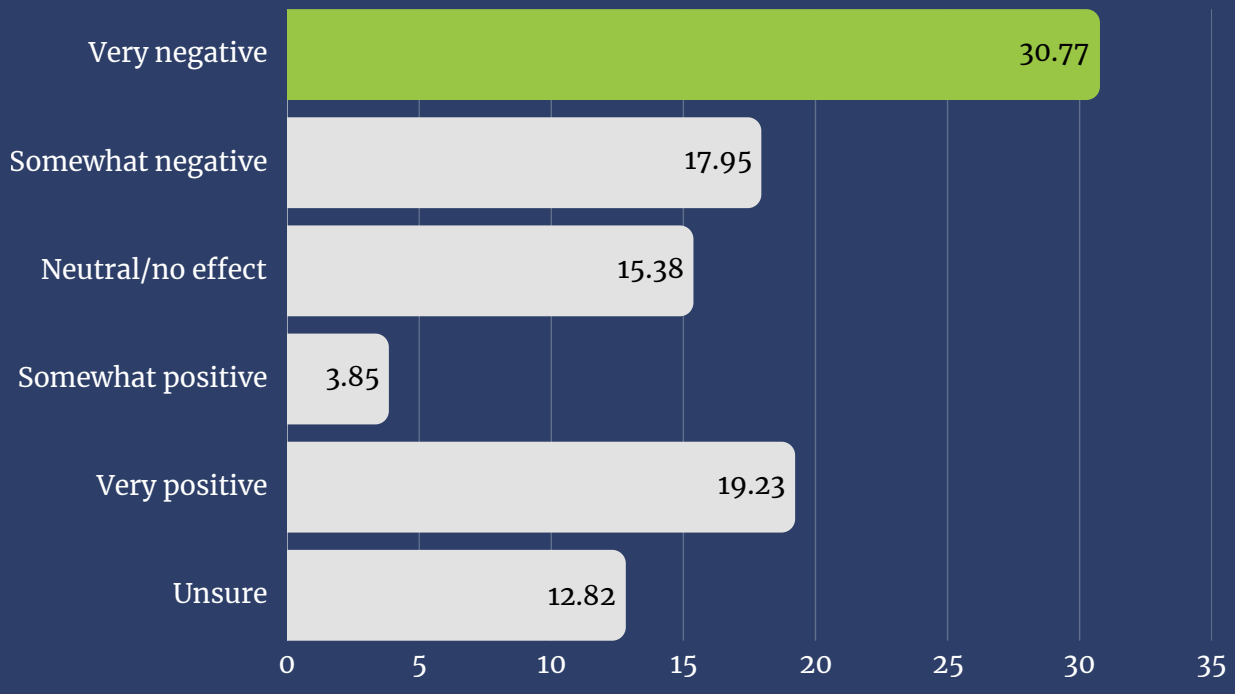
Results

7 out of 10



respondents reported feeling "somewhat to very concered" that these laws could impact sex education and other resources.

How do respondents describe the effects of these laws on the people they work with?



> Many of my clients are living in supported living with very little funds for "extras" or wanted items. This includes pornography. Age verification laws have heavily impacted this population as they typically do not have the funds to buy physical materials and are not permitted by their state appointed guardian to submit documentation for age verification. Resulting in little, or more commonly, no access to pornography. This has led to increased behaviors due to frustration and other feelings and sometimes even aggression towards staff due to these feelings.
>
> -Rachel Benson, MEd, BCBA, LBA, CSE, CBS, CBS-C 

> The looming threat of age verification has created a hostile online environment for those of us working in the sex education and pleasure products industries. Sites are culling us simply for talking about bodies and pleasure.
>
> -Diry Lola, Sex Educator 

> Age-verification laws are already impacting sex education in the US. Again and again, we were only told this was about keeping minors from accessing porn. Woodhull warned that these vague and overly broad policies would result in censorship of vital, non-explicit information about sex and gender. The results confirm our fears.
>
> -Ricci Levy, President and CEO of Woodhull Freedom Foundation 

What This Means

Woodhull has been warning legislators about the unintended consequences of age verification laws for years. These survey results demonstrate that sex educators are feeling the impact of laws that shouldn't influence their work at all. These laws are making it harder for sex educators to do their work and reach the people who count on them.

This means:

- Fewer places to get honest and medically accurate information about sexuality online
- Potential privacy violations and the end of anonymous searches for information

Turns out "protecting kids online" can cause tangible harm.