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Senate Bill 262

Version I Sponsor Statement

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Alaska is facing a youth mental health and well-being crisis that warrants decisive legislative action. Senate Bill 262 would prohibit children under 16 from having social media accounts and would prohibit social media companies from pushing recommended content to account holders under 18 years of age. This bill is a necessary and reasonable response to harms that are now well documented.

Youth engagement with social media is pervasive. According to the Pew Research Center, almost 70 percent of teens report being on TikTok at least once a day and more than 60 percent use Instagram daily. Teens visit these platforms frequently, often multiple times a day, with about 20 percent saying they use these platforms almost continuously.

The risks are substantial. Heavy social media use is correlated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem, particularly among adolescent girls. Researchers at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health have linked image-based platforms to body dissatisfaction and eating disorder risk. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory about the impacts of social media on teens. It found that "adolescents who spent more than 3 hours per day on social media faced double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety."

Social media platforms are not passive tools. They are deliberately designed to maximize engagement through addictive features such as endless scrolling, notifications, and algorithmic content delivery. In 2023, a coalition of 42 state attorneys general sued Meta, alleging the company knowingly designed products to addict minors while minimizing known mental health harms. Excessive use disrupts sleep, weakens attention, and interferes with academic performance.

Alaska would not be acting in isolation. Other nations and many U.S. states are adopting age-based restrictions, parental consent requirements, and liability standards for platforms. Age limits already exist across countless areas of law because children require protection while they mature. Social media should not be exempt. Senate Bill 262 acknowledges a hard reality: doing nothing is a policy choice. Protecting children must take priority over corporate interests.