



Clarion Ledger

Attorney General Lynn Fitch: Taking on big tech for our kids

Lynn Fitch | February 11, 2025

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory, noting that adolescents who spent more than 3 hours per day on social media face double the risk of anxiety and depression.

At the time, the average daily use of social media for adolescents was 4.8 hours.

In record numbers, young people are feeling lonely, disconnected, depressed and anxious. They experience low self-esteem, unhealthy body image and self-harm. They are repeatedly subjected to sometimes violent adult content, “thinspiration,” cyberbullying, sex trafficking and child predators. And their developing minds cannot disconnect from it.

Children are suffering and parents are looking for answers. They are looking for help because they and their children are up against the best engineers who have created the most sophisticated algorithms for the richest technology companies. It is simply not a fair fight.

Parents and children are not without their champions, however. A broad bipartisan coalition passed the Kids Online Safety Act through the U.S. Senate by a vote of 91-3, for example. Legislators who often appear to agree about nothing came together to help parents protect their children. Regrettably, the law never made it through the House.

States like Mississippi have taken up the cause of our children, as well. In 2024, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Walker Montgomery Protecting Children Online Act.

The law is named for a 16-year-old boy who took his own life when he got caught up in a sextortion scam through social media. The law has a few key provisions that boil down to requiring social media platforms to do what any responsible company already would do: make “commercially reasonable” efforts to protect minors.

The state is not asking them to make perfect or cost-prohibitive efforts. On behalf of children and their parents, the State is only asking them to make some effort that reflects basic reasonable care in light of their resources. Even that was too much to ask, and they sued to stop the law before it could even take effect. My office went before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals this week to defend the law.

Mississippi is also one of 42 states that have taken social media companies, like TikTok and Meta, to court. The evidence we have acquired through our investigation is staggering. The companies knew that they were causing harm to their minor consumers. Not only did they not address the harms, but they intentionally fed them increasingly addictive products. Our children were profit-making machines, and they were going to suck every dollar out of them, even if it left those children empty, hurting and damaged.

All this comes at a time when Big Tech is moving more and more devices and platforms to utilize end-to-end encryption. Simply put, end-to-end encryption means that we will no longer be able to detect illegal behavior like child pornography and sex trafficking online and law enforcement will no longer have access to evidence needed to prevent crimes like child exploitation.

In the second quarter of 2024, Meta alone sent 2.8 million CyberTips to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). More than 80,000 of these tips involved inappropriate interactions between adults and children – asking for illicit photos or videos or attempting to meet the child for a sexual encounter. More than 2.7 million were the sharing and re-sharing of child sexual abuse material.

With end-to-end encryption in place, the harm to children will still be happening, but now no one – not the social media companies, not law enforcement – will have the means to detect and stop it.

So, with one hand, social media companies are fighting any efforts by legislators to seek reasonable efforts to protect children from mental and physical harm online. And with the other hand, social media companies are locking law enforcement out of vital evidence to put away predators even after they have harmed a child.

Some of the most powerful names in Big Tech were present in the Capitol Rotunda for President Donald J. Trump’s inauguration last month. And just weeks earlier, in the waning days of the 118th Congress, top executives at X, including Elon Musk, had stepped up to try to bridge the gap for privacy advocates in an effort to save the Kids Online Safety Act. President Trump has their ear and parents need for him to use his influence to help save their children.