

California 1st with law protecting children's online privacy

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Assemblywoman Buffy Wicks, a Democrat, and her daughter, Josephine, 2, look up to the Assembly Gallery during the legislative session on Monday, Dec. 3, 2018, in Sacramento, Calif. California will be the first state to require companies that provide online services attractive to children to put the child's interest first, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Thursday, Sept. 15, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File

California will be the first state to require online companies to put kids' safety first by barring them from profiling children or using personal information in ways that could harm children physically or mentally, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Thursday.

"We're taking aggressive action in California to protect the health and wellbeing of our kids," Newsom said in a statement announcing that he had signed the bill. He noted that as a father of four, "I'm familiar with the real issues our children are experiencing online."

The bill requires [tech companies](#) that provide [online services](#) attractive to children to follow age-appropriate design code principles aimed at keeping children safe. Companies will eventually have to submit a "data protection impact assessment" to the state's attorney general before offering new online services, products, or features attractive to children.

Facebook parent company Meta said it has concerns about some of law's provisions but shares lawmakers' goal of keeping children safe online.

"We believe young people should have consistent protections across all apps and online services they use, which is why we support clear industry standards in this area," the social media giant said. It called the law "an important development towards establishing these standards."



Facebook's Meta logo sign is seen at the company headquarters in Menlo Park, Calif., on, Oct. 28, 2021. California will be the first state to require companies that provide online services attractive to children to put the child's interest first, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Thursday, Sept. 15, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Tony Avelar, File

The bill is modeled after a similar measure in the United Kingdom. In the year since that law took effect, some of the U.S.'s most valuable technology companies "have begun to redesign their products in children's best interests," said Democratic Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, a co-author of the law.

"Now we can ensure they do the same for California youth—and hopefully [young people](#) across the country," Wicks said.

The law was opposed by a coalition including the Entertainment Software Association that said it includes "an over-inclusive standard and would capture far more websites and platforms than necessary."

It's the second groundbreaking online protections bill signed by Newsom this week. The [earlier measure](#) requires [social media companies](#) to provide details on how and when they remove disturbing content including hate speech.



Assemblywoman Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, gets assistance on one of the Assembly computers from her daughter Elly, 11 months, during the Assembly session at the Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., Thursday, July 15, 2021. California will be the first state to require companies that provide online services attractive to children to put the child's interest first, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Thursday, Sept. 15, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File

But a third proposal failed to pass the state Legislature this year. It would have banned social media companies from adopting features it knows can cause children to become addicted.

Still, Jim Steyer, CEO of Common Sense Media, a nonprofit that advocates for children, said the bill Newsom signed on Thursday is "a necessary and positive steps forward in standing up to Big Tech."

The challenge of protecting children online resonated personally with Newsom's wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, and Wicks, who are both mothers of young children.

"I am terrified of the effects technology addiction and saturation are having on our children and their mental health," Siebel Newsom said in supporting the bill, though she acknowledged that "social media and the internet are integral to the way we as a global community connect and communicate."

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