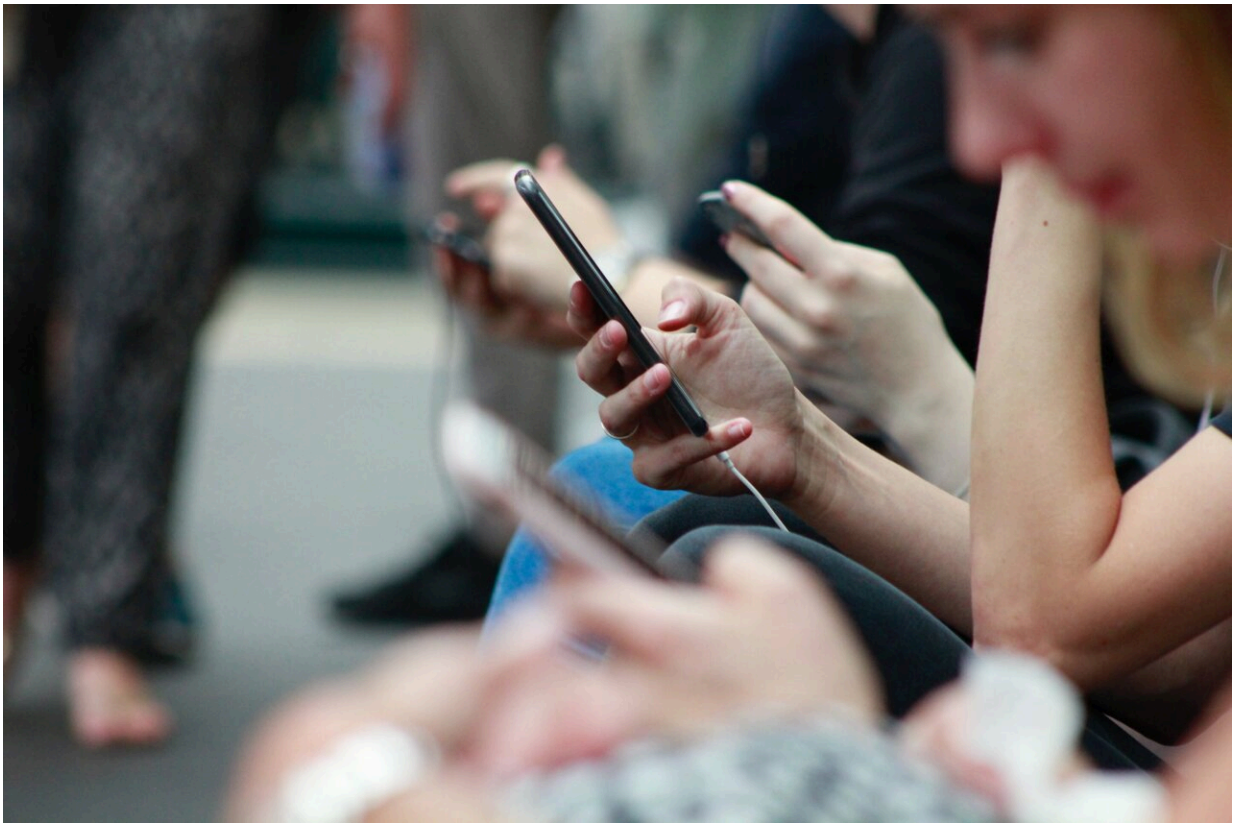


Arkansas House OKs social media age verification requirement

April 6 2023, by ANDREW DeMILLO



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Arkansas children would need their parents' OK to access social media sites under a bill Arkansas lawmakers advanced Wednesday, moving the state closer toward becoming the second to enact restrictions that critics

say [raise privacy and enforcement concerns](#).

The majority-Republican House approved by an 82-10 vote the restrictions, which have the support of GOP Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders. The proposal goes back to the Senate, which approved an earlier version of the bill, for one more vote before it can head to Sanders' desk.

"It is a bill designed to create a level of protection for our [young people](#)," Republican Rep. Jon Eubanks, the bill's House sponsor, said before representatives approved the measure without any debate.

The proposal is similar to a first-in-the-nation law that [Utah Gov. Spencer Cox signed last month](#). Several other states are considering similar measures, touted by supporters as a way to protect children.

Sanders last month announced her support for the Arkansas bill, which would require age verification and parental consent for users under the age of 18. The measure would require [social media](#) companies to contract with a third party vendor for age verification.

The proposals come as parents and lawmakers are growing increasingly concerned about kids and teenagers' social media use and how platforms affect youth [mental health](#).

"This is just common sense. One ill-advised moment online can mean a lifetime of pain offline," Sanders said at a news conference announcing the legislation. "Kids are not prepared for that kind of responsibility, and they're certainly not prepared for the world of dangerous content that big tech companies make readily available."

The restrictions would only apply to [social media platforms](#) that generate more than \$100 million in annual revenue. If Sanders signs the measure,

it would take effect in September.

Opponents of such restrictions have said the measures raise privacy concerns, noting that it would require any user to verify their age.

"People in Arkansas should not have to hand over their driver's license just to access free websites," Jason Kelley with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said in a statement. "By forcing people to do so, the law essentially stops people in the state from accessing vast parts of the web unless the government approves it."

Critics have also questioned whether the legislation could have unintended consequences, especially for youth already facing a mental health crisis.

"There are far better ways to solve this problem than legislating the government-mandated collection of sensitive personal information, which could unintentionally limit access to [online communities](#) that provide health and education resources and increase opportunities for fraudulent actors to seek [sensitive data](#) from consumers," Ruthie Barko, [executive director](#) for the central U.S. for TechNet, a group of technology CEOs and senior executives, said in a statement.

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