

Georgia kids would need parental permission to join social media if Senate Republicans get their way

August 8 2023, by Jeff Amy



Republican state Sen. Jason Anavitarte, of Dallas, speaks to a House subcommittee on Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022, at the Capitol in Atlanta. Anavitarte and Lt. Gov. Burt Jones said on Monday, Aug. 7, 2023, that they will seek to pass a law in 2024 requiring social media companies to obtain a parent's

permission for children to sign up for accounts. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Amy, File

Georgia could join other states requiring children to have their parents' explicit permission to create social media accounts.

Two top Republicans in the Georgia state Senate—Lt. Gov. Burt Jones and Sen. Jason Anavitate of Dallas—said in a Monday news conference they will seek to pass such a law in 2024. The proposal could also restrict accounts on other online services.

"It's important that we empower parents," Anavitate said. "A lot of parents don't know how to restrict content."

Anavitate said Georgia's rules would be modeled on a law Louisiana passed this year. That measure, which takes effect in 2024, says [social media](#) services must verify an account holder's age and can't let someone younger than 18 join without parental consent.

Arkansas, Texas and [Utah](#) also passed laws this year requiring parental consent for children to use social [media](#). Some in Congress are also proposing [parental consent](#) for minors.

California last year enacted a law requiring [online services](#) to do more to protect children's privacy and safety.

Anavitate said he has briefly been in contact with Meta Platforms, the company that owns Facebook and Instagram. He and Jones said they would discuss plans with the social media giant.

The move comes after [U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy warned](#) in May that social media hasn't been proven to be safe for [young people](#).

Murthy called on [tech companies](#), parents and caregivers to take "immediate action to protect kids now." He asked tech companies to share data and increase transparency and for policymakers to regulate social media for safety the way they do car seats and baby formula.



Burt Jones, candidate for Georgia lieutenant governor, participates in a Republican primary debate, Tuesday, May 3, 2022, in Atlanta. Jones and state Sen. Jason Anavitarte, of Dallas, a fellow Republican, said on Monday, Aug. 7, 2023, that they will seek to pass a law in 2024 requiring social media companies to obtain a parent's permission for children to sign up for accounts. Credit: AP Photo/Brynn Anderson, Pool, File

To comply with federal regulation, social media companies already ban

kids under 13 from signing up to their platforms, but children have been shown to easily evade the bans.

Up to [95% of teens](#) aged 13 to 17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use them "almost constantly," the Pew Research Center found.

Anavitarte also said he wants to strengthen Georgia's law on cyberbullying. Existing law requires any student found to have engaged in bullying three times be sent to an alternative school. Anavitarte said he wants to revive his 2022 proposal requiring schools to warn students and parents that some acts of bullying could lead to criminal stalking penalties.

Meta announced last year that it was taking steps to verify someone's age, including letting people upload their ID or record a video selfie; and partnering with an age verification company. Meta says it provides "age-appropriate experiences" for teens 13-17 on Instagram, including preventing unwanted contact from unknown adults.

Anavitarte this year sponsored a new law that bans TikTok, Telegram, WeChat and other applications from being installed or used on state-owned computers.

Free speech advocates warn the measures could lead sites to wall off information and even make it harder for adults to reach it.

The new laws could also lead platforms to require people to use government ID to verify age.

That's already happening on some pornography sites targeted by laws in Louisiana, Utah and Virginia. The Free Speech Coalition sued Utah and Louisiana on behalf of adult entertainers, erotica authors, sex educators

and casual porn viewers, saying those laws were unconstitutional because they discriminate against certain types of speech. A Utah judge dismissed the suit there last week, saying the challengers couldn't sue because of how the law is designed.

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