
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1856 (Wicks) - Age verification signals: software applications

Version: July 1, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: P., D.T., & C.P. 9 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Bob Franzoia

Bill Summary: AB 1856 would clarify and expand the Digital Age Assurance Act (DAAA).

Fiscal Impact: Possible costs to the Department of Justice (DOJ) of an unknown amount. Actual costs will depend on whether the Attorney General pursues enforcement actions, and, if so, the level of additional staffing DOJ needs to handle the related workload. If DOJ hires staff to handle enforcement actions authorized by this bill, the department would incur significant costs, likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars annually at a minimum. If DOJ does not pursue enforcement as authorized by this bill, DOJ would likely not incur any costs. (special funds, General Fund)

As the DAAA is not effective until January 1, 2027, there is no enforcement action data available for reference.

Unknown, potentially significant cost pressure to the trial court system to adjudicate civil actions. Expanding civil penalties could lead to lengthier and more complex court proceedings with attendant workload and resource costs to the court. The fiscal impact of this bill to the courts will depend on many unknowns, including the number of cases filed and the factors unique to each case. An eight-hour court day costs approximately \$10,500 in staff workload. While the courts are not funded on a workload basis, an increase in workload could result in delayed court services and would put pressure on the General Fund to fund additional staff and resources. The FY 2026-27 Budget appropriated \$70 million General Fund for this purpose (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund).

Background: The Legislature has passed numerous measures in recent years requiring businesses and social media companies to tailor their products and services to the unique needs of youth, and to protect the privacy of youth. However, some efforts like the Age Appropriate Design Code, AB 2273 (Wicks), Chapter 320/2022 and the Protecting Our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act SB 976 (Skinner) Chapter 321/2024 have been challenged in court, in part due to federal statutes and Constitutional law that severely constrains the ability of states to regulate online speech and platforms. This bill, and its predecessor, AB 1043 Wicks, Chapter 675/2025, seeks to avoid these legal battles and instead implement a content-neutral approach to age verification that does not dictate product design.

Proposed Law: This bill clarifies that the requirements of the DAAA apply to child users who are the primary users of a device. The bill expands the DAAA to apply to browsers and websites, as specified, thereby significantly expanding the framework.

Related Legislation: AB 1043 (Wicks) Chapter 675/2025 requires a device manufacturer to provide an interface in which the account holder of a device may input the age of the primary user of the device for the purpose of complying with age verification and parental consent laws.

In the AB 1043 signing message, Governor Newsom stated, in part:

Streaming services and video game developers contend that this bill's framework, while well suited to traditional applications, does not fit their respective products. Many of these companies have existing age verification systems in place, addressing complexities such as multi-user accounts shared by a family and user profiles utilized across multiple devices. As this bill does not take effect until January 1, 2027, I urge the Legislature to enact legislation in 2026 to address these particular concerns.