
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 56 (Bauer-Kahan) - Social media: warning labels

Version: July 10, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: JUD. 12 - 0, HEALTH 10 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Liah Burnley

Bill Summary: AB 56 requires social media platforms to display a black box warning to a user each day the user first accesses the social media platform, and periodically thereafter, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown, potentially significant costs to the state funded trial court system (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund) to adjudicate additional case filings that otherwise would not have been commenced. 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 in workload. This is a conservative estimate, based on the hourly rate of court personnel including at minimum the judge, clerk, bailiff, court reporter, jury administrator, administrative staff, and jury per-diems. If court days exceed 10, costs to the trial courts could reach hundreds of thousands of dollars. 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 and to increase the amount appropriated to backfill for trial court operations.
- The Department of Justice (DOJ) reports a fiscal impact of \$600,000 or less (General Fund, Unfair Competition Law Fund) DOJ notes that implementation of this bill will be dependent upon the appropriation of funds. The DOJ will be unable to absorb the costs to comply with or implement the requirements of the bill within existing budgeted resources. DOJ reports that its Government Law Section (GLS), within the Civil Law Division anticipates an increase in workload due to potential legal challenges upon the enactment of AB 56. To address the increase in workload, GLS will require the following resources in each fiscal year: FY 2025-26: 175 hours of a Deputy Attorney General (DAG) and \$10,000 for external consultant experts and witnesses; FY 2026-27: 200 hours of a DAG and \$20,000 for external consultant experts and witnesses; and, FY 2027-28: 150 hours of a DAG. The DOJ further notes that the Consumer Protection Section (CPS) within the Public Rights Division anticipates increased workloads in enforcing AB 56 beginning on January 1, 2026, and ongoing. The workload includes investigating and prosecuting violations of not adhering to AB 56. The Section will require 1.0 Deputy Attorney General, 1.0 Legal Secretary and \$150,000 in external consultants, which will have an impact to the Unfair Competition Law Fund.

- Unknown, potential costs (General Fund) to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) if the department adopts regulations to update the warning label, possibly in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars if additional staffing is needed.

Background: There is a growing body of research about the harm that social media use can have on users – particularly heavy, prolonged use, and particularly for young users. In 2024, the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy described the mental health crisis among young people as an “emergency” and called social media use an “important contributor” to the crisis. Dr. Murthy called for a surgeon general’s warning on social media platforms, citing the effectiveness of tobacco warning labels in increasing awareness and changing behavior.

Proposed Law:

- Defines “covered platform” has the same meaning as addictive internet-based service or application, as defined in existing law.
- For each calendar day in which a user uses a covered platform, the covered platform shall display, the black box warning to the user when the user initially accesses the covered platform. The black box warning shall be displayed clearly and continuously for a duration of at least 10 seconds, unless the user affirmatively dismisses the warning by clicking on a conspicuous “X” icon. That black box warning shall be displayed in a manner that occupies at least 25 percent of the screen or window that the user is using to access the covered platform.
- For each calendar day in which a user uses a covered platform, the covered platform shall display the black box warning after three hours of cumulative active use and thereafter at least once per hour of cumulative active use:
 - The black box warning shall be displayed clearly and continuously for a duration of at least 90 seconds, without providing the ability to bypass or click through the warning, in a manner that occupies at between 75 percent and 100 percent of the screen or window that the user is using to access the covered platform.
 - If the covered platform has actual knowledge that a user is over 17 years of age, the black box warning displayed to the user shall be displayed clearly and continuously for a duration of at least 10 seconds, unless the user affirmatively dismisses the warning by clicking on a conspicuous “X” icon. That black box warning shall be displayed in a manner that occupies at least 25 percent of the screen or window that the user is using to access the covered platform.
- The black box warning consists of the following text displayed clearly, conspicuously, and legibly in black text on a white background:

“The Surgeon General has warned that while social media may have benefits for some young users, social media is

associated with significant mental health harms and has not been proven safe for young users.”

- The Director of the State Department of Public Health may adopt regulations to modify the warning, as specified.
- Provides that, the provision of the notice, or a user affirmatively dismissing the notice, does not waive, release, otherwise limit, or serve as a defense to, any claim, including claims premised on failure to warn, other than a claim premised on a violation of this section.

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