CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS
CSA1 Bill Id:AB 56¶Author:(Bauer-Kahan and Wicks)
As Enrolled Ver:September 16, 2025
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires, beginning in 2027, covered platforms to display to children mental health warning labels about the harms associated with social media when the child logs on to the platform and after extended use.

Senate Amendments
Incorporate an existing definition of a covered platform, limit the bill′s application to children, eliminate the Department of Public Health′s authority to update the language of the warning, and delay operation of the bill until January 1, 2027.

COMMENTS

In June of 2024, former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called for safety warning labels – akin to those a predecessor called for on cigarettes in 1964 – on social media platforms in order to remind teens and parents that social media has not been proven safe.[1] The Surgeon General wrote:

> The mental health crisis among young people is an emergency — and social media has emerged as an important contributor. Adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on social media face double the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms, and the average daily use in this age group, as of the summer of 2023, was 4.8 hours. Additionally, nearly half of adolescents say social media makes them feel worse about their bodies.
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> It is time to require a surgeon general′s warning label on social media platforms, stating that social media is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents. A surgeon general′s warning label . . . would regularly remind parents and adolescents that social media has not been proved safe. Evidence from tobacco studies show that warning labels can increase awareness and change behavior.[2]

This bill responds to Surgeon General Murthy′s call for a warning label. Beginning in 2027, covered platforms would be required to display to child users a warning when the child first logs on, again after three hours of cumulative active use, and hourly thereafter, until the end of the calendar day. The warning reads:

> 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.

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[1] Dr. Vivek Murthy, "Surgeon General: Why I'm Calling for a Warning Label on Social Media Platforms" *New York Times* (Jun. 17, 2024), https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/17/opinion/social-media-health-warning.html. ("Surgeon General's Call for a Warning Label").
[2] *Ibid.*

A user is considered a child for these purposes unless the platform reasonably determines that the user is an adult. This approach aligns with last year′s SB 976 (Skinner, Ch. 321, Stats. 2024), which imposed limits on platforms′ use of certain addictive features on children.

According to the Author
We are in the midst of a global mental health crisis. In the last decade or so, young people around the world, have experienced a dramatic spike rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide. The crisis is real, urgent, and getting worse. Mounting evidence shows that online addiction in children is a widespread problem, with troubling implications for their mental health and well-being. More time on social media tends to be correlated with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and interference with daily life, including establishing healthy sleep patterns. With AB 56 we′re responding to the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy′s call that all users of social media be warned about the risks associated with heavy social media use.

Arguments in Support
The California Medical Association writes:

> Mounting evidence shows that online addiction in children is a widespread problem, with troubling implications for their mental health and well-being. As the United States Surgeon General has reported, recent evidence has identified "reasons for concern" about social media usage by children and adolescents. This evidence includes a study concluding that the risk of poor mental health outcomes doubles for children and adolescents who use social media at least three hours a day and research finding that social media usage is linked to a variety of negative health outcomes, including low self-esteem and disordered eating, for adolescent girls.
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> Approximately 95% of 13 to 17-year-olds, inclusive, say that they use at least one social media platform, and more than one-third report using social media almost constantly. More time on social media tends to be correlated with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, susceptibility to addiction, and interference with daily life, including learning. Heavier usage of social media also leads to less healthy sleep patterns and sleep quality, which can in turn exacerbate both physical and mental health problems. Social media companies are not transparent about these harms.
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> Social media warning labels are an equitable, effective, and transparent way to ensure public health information gets to the public.

Arguments in Opposition
A coalition of opponents, led by TechNet, writes:

> First, the bill raises several constitutional concerns as it requires a government-mandated label on user-generated speech. The label isn′t narrowly tailored to address the stated risk of harm to youth mental health. For example, the bill requires a 10 second warning upon accessing a covered platform, followed by a 30 second, unskippable warning after three hours of use to be applied to every site that meets the bill′s definition of social media. It doesn′t apply to specific content, accounts, or even platforms that are most likely to pose risks of harm to minor users.
>
> Additionally, the bill infringes on the speech rights of minors and adults alike by creating a significant barrier to access information and communicate with others. Some studies have

shown that 40% of users will give up waiting for a website to load after just 3 seconds. It is highly likely that users will navigate away from these sites or will find workarounds to prevent this label from appearing.

Second, the bill requires the warning label to be shown to all users, even adults, unless the platform can reasonably determine that the user is a minor. This is a de facto requirement to verify the age of all users in order to appropriately target a warning to minor users. The only reliable method to accurately assess a user′s age is by collecting more personal information such as birthdates, addresses, and government IDs meaning every California resident will likely be asked to submit more personal information.

Third, the warning required by AB 56 is unlikely to be accurate in the majority of situations. It obviously is inapplicable to adults, particularly those without children, trying to access social media, but for most minors trying to communicate with friends or access useful or educational information the label tells them nothing about what kinds of content or online behaviors are most likely to impact their mental health. Courts would examine the government′s interest in compelling platforms to provide an inaccurate label, one that would apply regardless of the user demographics, content, or safety features the platform had implemented. As a result, the label is clearly not the least restrictive means to improve youth mental health.
Lastly, the fundamental policy objective of the proposed warning label is unclear. If the goal is to increase user awareness or change user behavior, it is essential to assess whether a warning label is the most effective tool to achieve that outcome. A poorly executed warning label may have limited impact, especially if it interrupts user experience or becomes repetitive and ignored over time. Research on "warning fatigue" suggests that users may disregard frequently encountered warnings, diminishing their intended effect.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

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.

VOTES:

ASM PRIVACY AND CONSUMER PROTECTION: 11-1-3
YES: Bauer-Kahan, Dixon, Bryan, Irwin, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Ortega, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Ward, Wicks
NO: DeMaio
ABS, ABST OR NV: Macedo, Patterson, Wilson

ASM JUDICIARY: 10-1-1
YES: Kalra, Dixon, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Stefani, Zbur
NO: Macedo
ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-1-3
YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache
NO: Tangipa
ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez, Dixon, Ta

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 50-0-29
YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Stefani, Wallis, Wicks, Zbur, Rivas
ABS, ABST OR NV: Alanis, Alvarez, Bains, Bryan, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Krell, Lackey, Macedo, Nguyen, Patterson, Rogers, Sanchez, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Ward, Wilson

SENATE FLOOR: 30-5-5
YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Hurtado, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO: Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Grove, Seyarto, Strickland
ABS, ABST OR NV: Dahle, Jones, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Valladares

UPDATED

VERSION: September 16, 2025

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