

Attorney General Raoul: Social Media Platforms Exploit Children And Teens For Profit

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CHICAGO – Attorney General Kwame Raoul, as part of a bipartisan coalition of 52 attorneys general, expressed strong support for the hearings being conducted by the U.S. Senate Committee addressing the protection and safety of children and teens using social media.

Raoul and the attorneys general [issued a letter](#) to the leaders of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security expressing serious concerns over the impacts of social media on children and teens. Those concerns have grown with the recent research from Facebook’s own internal studies showing that social media is inflicting harm – in the form of increased mental distress, bullying, suicide, and other self-harm – on a significant number of children.

“Facebook is well aware that using its platforms have significantly harmed children and teens, leading them to develop eating disorders, exposing them to increased bullying, or resulting in them harming themselves – or even taking their own lives,” Raoul said. “Facebook should put the health and safety of children before profits. As a state attorney general, I have been committed to protecting children online and teaching them about healthy online interactions. I am calling on Congress to take federal action by demanding more transparency from Facebook and holding the company accountable for damage that has been knowingly inflicted on young people.”

Raoul’s letter recognizes the Senate’s hearings will uncover critical information about the business practices that social media companies are using to gain the attention of more young people on their platforms. Raoul and the attorneys general believe the current and future well-being of the nation’s youth is at stake.

In May 2021, Raoul and a bipartisan coalition of 44 attorneys general [wrote a letter to Facebook](#) CEO Mark Zuckerberg urging the company to abandon its plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under the age of 13. That request was ignored. Last week, in advance of the Congressional hearings, Facebook announced its intent to “pause” the project. Raoul and the attorneys general continue to strongly believe the project should be abandoned altogether.

In the letter, Raoul and the attorneys general write that “More engagement by the user equals more data to leverage for advertising, which equals greater profit. This prompts social media companies to design their algorithms and other features to psychologically manipulate young users into a state of addiction to their cell phone screens.”

The Attorney General’s office is committed to enhancing digital safety among children and teens, and Raoul’s letter to the Senate’s subcommittee is the latest action his office has taken to protect youth online. Raoul’s office, with a grant from the U.S. Department

of Justice runs Illinois' Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force that investigates child sexual exploitation crimes, trains law enforcement agencies and provides online safety education to children and adults. In response to increasing reports of online child exploitation, Raoul announced a series of ICAC webinars aimed at giving parents, guardians, and educators tools to help children and teens foster healthy online interactions. The free webinars, which begin Oct. 7, will teach parents and guardians about the social media apps children and teens may be using; how to help youth navigate aggressive online behavior, both as a victim and as a perpetrator; and how to identify signs that a child may have been a victim of online child solicitation. Interested parties should email Karilyn.orr@ilag.gov to register.