

Attorney General Raoul Files Lawsuit Against Meta For Business Practices That Harm Children

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CHICAGO - Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul today announced that his office filed [a lawsuit](#) against Meta Platforms Inc. (Meta), the company that owns and operates Facebook and Instagram, for its harmful business practices targeting children.

The lawsuit, backed by a broad, bipartisan coalition of 33 states, was filed today in the federal district court for the Northern District of California. In their lawsuit, Raoul and the attorneys general allege that Meta's business model, which seeks to capture as much user time and attention as possible to sell advertising, has targeted youth, including teenagers and even younger children, in ways that take advantage of them.

"Our children are in crisis, and we need to act," Raoul said. "The addictive features on Meta's social media platforms interfere with sleep and education, enable cyberbullying, and contribute to depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia and thoughts of self-harm. I believe the action we are taking today against Meta is one of – if not the most – important consumer protection actions my office will take. The consequences will affect an entire generation of young people. I am committed to holding Meta, and any other responsible actors, accountable for putting profits ahead of our children."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second-leading cause of death among youth between the ages of 10 and 14. During the decade since Instagram's rise in popularity, the CDC reported that the number of high school students who experience feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts and ideation increased by 40%. In that same time period, there was a 30% increase in the rate of high school girls who attempted suicide.

Raoul and the coalition allege that Meta designed its social media platforms to include features that exploit young users' psychological vulnerabilities to keep them using the platforms longer, and that many of these product features are strongly linked to damaging psychological outcomes. The attorneys general allege that Meta is aware of the potential harms its products cause youth, including driving impulsive behavior; interfering with sleep and education; and exacerbating issues young people have with depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia and thoughts of self-harm. Meta's own research confirmed that its social media platforms are among the worst in harming young users.

"Our son, Nate Bronstein, forever 15, is no longer with us because social media platforms have for far too long placed profits over children's safety," said Rose and Rob Bronstein, whose son, died in 2022. "Nate, a super-sharp, funny kid who loved making others laugh, was cyberbullied by fellow students at the Latin School of Chicago. These teens, blinded by the drive to get shares and views, and emboldened by features like self-deleting messages, relied on social media to send vile, threatening messages to Nate, leading to his tragic passing. Reasonable people everywhere have long realized the danger that social media poses to our children, yet the unsafe features remain, and the harm continues, while the profits grow. Thank you to our courageous elected leaders for holding the social media platforms accountable for this reprehensible behavior and protecting other families from having to endure the worst imaginable tragedy."

“Smartphones and social media are almost universally in every young person’s hand and have the capacity to deeply harm and exacerbate mental health challenges for young people,” said NAMI Illinois CEO Alexa James. “This is a serious public health issue complicating a deeply serious mental health crisis our children and their families are already facing.”

According to the surgeon general, eighth and tenth graders now spend an average of three-and-a-half hours per day on social media. In Illinois, nearly a million Illinois teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 access Instagram every month. From 2020 to 2021 in Illinois alone, over half a million Illinois teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 accessed Instagram every day.

Raoul’s lawsuit alleges that Meta violated the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) by collecting the personal information of children under the age of 13 without obtaining parental permission as required by that statute. The coalition is asking the court to enter an injunction stopping Meta from continuing these unlawful practices.

Today’s lawsuit stems from a bipartisan nationwide [investigation](#) announced by Raoul in November 2021, and is part of the Attorney General’s efforts to protect children online and address the negative impacts of social media platforms on young Illinois residents. In May 2021, Raoul [joined a bipartisan coalition of](#) 44 attorneys general urging Facebook to abandon its plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under the age of 13. In March 2022, Raoul also announced a bipartisan nationwide [investigation](#) into TikTok for providing and promoting its social media platform to children and young adults despite its use being associated with physical and mental health harms.

Attorney General Raoul is reminding young people who are struggling that they are not alone and should talk to friends or trusted adults. Raoul urges individuals in crisis to call the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) or call 911.

Still photos from the Attorney General’s remarks are attached and can be attributed to Patrick Ryan, Office of the Attorney General.