

Senators move to keep Big Tech's creepy companion bots away from kids

Big Tech says bans aren't the answer

As the bill advances, it could change, senators and parents acknowledged at the press conference. It will likely face backlash from privacy advocates who have raised concerns that widely collecting personal data for age verification puts sensitive information at risk of a data breach or other misuse.

The tech industry has already voiced opposition. On Tuesday, Chamber of Progress, a Big Tech trade group, criticized the law as taking a "heavy-handed approach" to child safety. The group's vice president of US policy and government relations, K.J. Bagchi, said that "we all want to keep kids safe, but the answer is balance, not bans.

"It's better to focus on transparency when kids chat with AI, curbs on manipulative design, and reporting when sensitive issues arise," Bagchi said.

However, several organizations dedicated to child safety online, including the Young People's Alliance, the Tech Justice Law Project, and the Institute for Families and Technology, cheered senators' announcement Tuesday. The GUARD Act, these groups told Time, is just "one part of a national movement to protect children and teens from the dangers of

companion chatbots.”

Mourning parents are rallying behind that movement. Earlier this month, Garcia praised California for “finally” passing the first state law requiring companies to protect their users who express suicidal ideations to chatbots.

“American families, like mine, are in a battle for the online safety of our children,” Garcia said at that time.

During Tuesday’s press conference, Blumenthal noted that the chatbot ban bill was just one initiative of many that he and Hawley intend to raise to heighten scrutiny on AI firms.

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