

SAMMY’S LAW: HELPING PROTECT OUR CHILDREN FROM THE DANGERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Sammy of Sammy’s Law

Sixteen-year-old Sammy Chapman was an amazing kid — sweet, funny, curious, and a top student. His parents worked hard to keep him away from danger. But, like most parents, they had no idea that drug dealers were taking advantage of children using social media. On February 7, 2021, a drug dealer reached out to Sammy through social media and delivered drugs to him at his home, just like a pizza. The drugs turned out to have been laced with a lethal dose of the opioid fentanyl to make them more addictive. Sammy had no idea he was taking it and tragically lost his life.

Sammy is but one of the millions of young victims of social media-related dangers this past year.

Adverse Effects of Social Media

Social media-related dangers include, but are not limited to:

- According to one study, about 43% of young adults had seen self-harm content on Instagram. About 32.5% indicated that they had performed the same or similar self-harming behavior as a consequence.¹
- About 46% of students report experiencing cyberbullying.²
- Adolescents who spend more than 3 hours per day on social media face double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety.³
- According to another study, a new account set up on one social media platform by a 13-year-old user who views and likes content about body image and mental health will be recommended that content every 39 seconds on average.⁴
- About 20% of teens have sent or posted a nude or semi-nude photo or video of themselves with high rates of reported pressure and coercion.⁵
- One in four young people see illicit drugs advertised for sale on social media.⁶
- Approximately 5% of students reported that they had been the victim of sextortion.⁷
- Many child trafficking and sex crimes now originate from social media sites where predators gain knowledge of their victims’ likes and habits.⁸

Because of social media-related dangers, children are being injured, and families are being destroyed.

¹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1461444819850106>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/12/15/teens-and-cyberbullying-2022/>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31509167/>

⁴ https://counterhate.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CCDH-Deadly-by-Design_120922.pdf

⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31309428/>

⁶ <https://volteface.me/dm-details-selling-drugs-age-social-media/>

⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1079063218800469>

⁸ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Chapter5.pdf

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Legislative Solution

One of the most effective ways for parents to protect children is by using third-party safety apps. These apps can provide alerts to parents when dangerous content is shared through children's social media accounts, enabling life-saving interventions at critical moments.

We know from the data and stories of successful interventions that these alerts have already protected so many children. For example, if a child is expressing thoughts of suicide via social media, a parent who has received an alert through a third-party safety app can immediately provide mental health support and, if necessary, seek professional assistance.

Sammy's Law is a bipartisan solution that builds on this success and adds another tool in the toolbox to help parents, kids, and families.

Specifically, it will require large social media platforms with either 100 million monthly active users or garner \$1 billion in gross revenue per year adjusted for inflation to make real-time application programming interfaces accessible to FTC-registered third-party safety software providers. Parents will be alerted when 15 specific instances arise, including phrases that suggest eating disorders, suicidal ideation, and sexual harassment.

Parents are left with few options to protect children from social media-related dangers, with disastrous consequences. If social media platforms continue to profit from minors, they must step up and provide parents with the choice to use effective, third-party safety apps.