

Hearing Speech on the Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly Act Regarding App Stores and Online Content Regulation

I am here to introduce a pivotal piece of legislation introduced in the Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly. This act addresses a growing concern in our digital age: the regulation of app stores, operating systems, and online services to protect minors from mature content. This legislation takes critical steps to ensure responsible digital governance and safeguard our younger generation from exposure to inappropriate online material.

With the rise of technology, minors have unprecedented access to digital content through various devices, including mobile phones, tablets, and computers. While these advancements offer numerous educational and social benefits, they also expose minors to explicit content that may not be suitable for their age. This legislation seeks to hold covered manufacturers, operating system providers, and app store providers accountable for enforcing proper age verification and content restrictions.

This legislation introduces several mandates to create a safer online environment:

1. Age Verification Mechanism

- Covered manufacturers must take commercially reasonable and technically feasible steps to determine or estimate the primary user's age upon activation of a device.
- A real-time application programming interface (API) must be implemented to indicate whether a primary user is over or under eighteen years of age.

2. Content Restriction Requirements

- Websites, applications, or online services that provide a substantial portion (more than one-third) of mature content must recognize digital age signals and block access for minors.
- They must display disclaimers indicating the presence of mature content and label their platforms as restricted to adults.

3. App Store Provider Responsibilities

- App stores must determine and verify the age of individuals purchasing or using apps within the state.
- Verifiable parental consent must be obtained before allowing minors to download or make in-app purchases.
- A commercially available mechanism must be provided for parents to block the download of age-inappropriate apps.

4. Parental Control Measures

- If an app store provider advertises parental controls, it must ensure clear and easily accessible mechanisms for parents to filter content and limit app usage for minors.
- Developers must also provide features enabling parents to set time restrictions and monitor app usage.

5. Enforcement and Compliance

- The Attorney General is granted exclusive authority to enforce this legislation.
- Violators will receive a written notice and have 45 days to correct non-compliance before legal action is taken.
- A fine of \$10,000 will be imposed for each violation.
- The legislation ensures that compliance efforts are commercially reasonable and technically feasible to prevent undue burden on businesses.

While this act prioritizes child safety, it also takes care not to hinder innovation, competitiveness, or free speech. The legislation does not apply to bona fide news or public interest broadcasts and does not impose liability on internet service providers or search engines for content beyond their control. The goal is not censorship but the responsible dissemination of age-appropriate content

This legislation is a necessary step toward a safer digital landscape for minors. By enforcing strict age verification, enabling parental controls, and ensuring content providers act responsibly, we can create an online ecosystem that respects both freedom and accountability.

I urge my fellow legislators to support this bill and uphold our duty to protect the well-being of our children in the digital world.