

Social media use crackdown proposed

Law would restrict access by minors

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Louisiana could crack down next year on minors' social media use, potentially requiring age verification for Facebook, Instagram and other platforms as part of a national push to shield children from some social media content.

Sen. Patrick McMath, R-Covington, said his bill, Senate Bill 162, would help address a "public health crisis" of children and teenagers spending too much time on social media and encountering dangerous content and people. It was modeled after a controversial Utah law that banned youth from using social media without their parents' permission.

If the bill passes the Legislature, it would not take effect until July 1, 2024, giving lawmakers another session to tweak rules. The House Commerce Committee on Tuesday sent the bill to the House floor; the House and Senate would need to agree to any changes before sending it to Gov. John Bel Edwards for his signature.

Several other states have passed or are considering passing similar laws, and a bipartisan group of lawmakers in Congress have introduced legislation targeting social media use by kids and teens.

McMath said he worked with Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, on changes to the bill that the House panel adopted Tuesday. The bill as originally drafted would have required social media companies to ensure users are 16 or older, get parental consent for users younger than 16, set curfews for users under 16 and added other restrictions to those users' accounts.

The amendments took out the curfew provision and added the platforms Snapchat and YouTube to the restrictions. The amendments also require platforms to verify ages only for those users who say they are under 16, said McMath and Josh Borill, a lobbyist for Meta. The bill says a minor is considered someone a social media company knows or "reasonably believes" is under 16.

The rules also would only apply to new platform accounts, per the amendments. The bill tasks the Attorney General's Office with policing social media platforms to ensure compliance. The Senate Finance Committee had previously made clear the bill would take effect only if lawmakers added funding to the budget for it.

Some lawmakers on the commerce panel said they are reluctant to submit their children's private data to companies such as Facebook or Instagram, and noted that they already can decide whether to allow their child to use social media. But other lawmakers said it is difficult to police the types of content children and teens find online.

The bill passed without objection after the changes were made.

The Legislature likely will change the rules again before the law goes into effect next summer.