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## **California Child Advocates Heap Praise on Utah Lawmakers for Enacting a First-In-The-Nation Law Holding Social Media Platforms Accountable for Making Addicts of Children**

*Utah's HB 311 modeled after a California bill killed by Big Tech last year.*

(Salt Lake City, UT): Today California child advocates heaped praise on the Utah Legislature and Utah Governor Spencer Cox who, with the stroke of a pen, has protected all the children of Utah against social media giants using features and techniques they know medically addict Utah's children to their platforms.

Governor Cox signed HB 311, a bill by Utah Representative Jordan Teuscher, that is virtually identical to a 2022 California bill — AB 2408 (Cunningham). Last year, that California bill received broad bi-partisan legislative support and no “no” votes, but died without a vote in the California Senate's Appropriations Committee.

Ed Howard, Senior Counsel at the University of San Diego School of Law's Children's Advocacy Institute — which co-sponsored and spearheaded the effort to enact the California law last year — attended today's signing ceremony at the invitation of the Utah legislator who authored it and stated, “Governor Cox's bold and visionary signature today is rightly seen as a challenge to every other Governor, every other state legislator: will you continue to tolerate social media platforms knowingly making addicts of your state's children? Knowingly causing your state's children to die by suicide, barrage our teen girls with pro-anorexia content, and buy fentanyl? When it comes to protecting our children from what social media platforms know they are doing to them, when is enough enough?”

Former California Assemblymember Jordan Cunningham, who co-authored AB 2408, said: “Our kids need basic safeguards on social media, to keep them from being addicted, exploited, and harmed. I'm thrilled to see Utah build on the work we did with AB 2408 last year and enact the first law in the nation that imposes penalties on Big Tech companies for causing addiction and harm to kids. I hope other states follow suit.”

Citing data showing the average teenager currently spends 7.5 hours on digital platforms and that we have condoms for sex, cars with seat belts, and safety standards for toys, yet no standard of safety for the place where the average American teen will spend over 30 years of their life, Larissa May, founder of #HalfTheStory said: “Technology is a social determinant of public health. Utah enacting HB 311 is a monumental step and fight for the digital wellbeing movement.”

“Social media can provide a valuable means of connecting young people, but can also cause significant harm,” said Dr. Sarita Patel, child and adolescent psychiatrist at California’s Jewish Family and Children’s Services. “It is imperative that we address the role that social media plays in contributing to specific psychiatric disorders, including eating disorders, suicidal ideation and self-harm, and substance abuse.”

These California-based child advocacy groups, as well as parents and mental health advocates, are this year supporting [SB 287 by Senator Nancy Skinner](#) that, like HB 311, will permit harmed children to hold platforms accountable for knowingly or negligently causing child addiction, but also impose similar accountability for facilitating the sale of fentanyl and promoting eating disorders and suicide.

“California can once again be a national leader in protecting children if it enacts SB 287,” said Howard.

Utah’s HB 311 provides an explicit ability of harmed children and parents to sue social media platforms to obtain money to reimburse them for the costs of treating the addiction harms they cause, penalties to dissuade child addiction, and a safe harbor for platforms that do the right thing, audit their practices, and stop those that addict children. HB 311 is stronger than the preceding California AB 2408 as it creates a presumption of liability for addiction caused to children younger than 16 and permits parents and children to sue, like the introduced version of 2408.

Governor Cox’s signature comes in the midst of an unprecedented spike in child suicides, eating disorders, drug overdoses, and major depression that experts, parents, whistle blower-disclosed research, investigative reports, the Surgeon General, and President Biden all say are in significant part explained by the corresponding spike in the use of social media by children. Hundreds of lawsuits, including three by school districts, have been filed with similar allegations.

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*The Children’s Advocacy Institute, founded at the nonprofit University of San Diego (USD) School of Law in 1989, is one of the nation’s premiere academic, research, and advocacy organizations working to improve the health, safety, and well-being of children and youth. In its academic component, CAI trains USD Law students to effectively advocate on behalf of children and youth. Conducted through offices in San Diego, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C., CAI’s research and advocacy component leverages change for children and youth at the federal and state levels through impact litigation, legislative and regulatory advocacy, and public education. CAI’s mission is to ensure that children’s interests are represented effectively whenever and wherever government makes policy and budget decisions that will impact them. Visit [www.caichildlaw.org](http://www.caichildlaw.org).*