



**BETTY T. YEE**  
California State Controller

August 8, 2022

The Honorable Anthony Portantino, Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
State Capitol, Room 412  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**SUBJECT: Assembly Bill 2408 (Cunningham/ Wicks) – SUPPORT**

Dear Chairman Portantino:

I write to ask your support for Assembly Bill 2408, as amended on June 30, which would prohibit a social media platform from using a design, feature, or affordance that the platform knows, or should know by the exercise of reasonable care, causes a child user to become addicted to the platform.

A study conducted on Facebook involving nearly 700,000 users to test the emotional impacts of social networks has shown that the emotions expressed by friends, via online social networks, have a significant influence on our own moods.<sup>1</sup> These findings are nothing short of alarming when applied to children and teenagers. Among teenagers, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube are the most popular social media sites, with research showing 45 percent of teenagers are “online almost constantly.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, Instagram alone is estimated to have more than 22 million daily teenage users. This same study also showed a troubling connection between problematic social media site use and psychiatric disorder systems, such as depression and anxiety, specifically in adolescents.

Making matters worse, social media companies are aware of these dangers. Specifically, a recent New York Times article noted, “To achieve its record-setting growth, the [Facebook] had continued building on its core technology, making business decisions based on how many hours of the day people spent on Facebook and how many times a day they returned. Facebook’s algorithms didn’t measure if the magnetic force pulling them back to Facebook was the habit of wishing a friend happy

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<sup>1</sup> Adam D. I. Kramer et al., Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks (June 17, 2014) Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, vol. 111, No. 24, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1320040111>.

<sup>2</sup> Zaheer Hussain and Mark D Griffiths, Problematic Social Networking Site Use and Comorbid Psychiatric Disorders: A Systematic Review of Recent Large-Scale Studies.” (December 14, 2018) Frontiers in psychiatry vol. 9 686, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6302102/pdf/fpsy-09-00686.pdf>.

birthday, or a rabbit hole of conspiracies and misinformation. Facebook's problems were features, not bugs."<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, astonishing revelations came to light when a Facebook whistle-blower began sharing internal documents with the Wall Street Journal. Instagram (which is owned by Facebook) researchers seemingly confirmed the findings of various studies showing how problematic social media site usage can result in negative mental health outcomes for users, specifically teens. According to the Wall Street Journal, "Thirty-two percent of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse," also noting that "Comparisons on Instagram can change how young women view and describe themselves." These researchers noted, "We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls" and, "Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression."<sup>4</sup>

Social media companies have perfected the science of addicting children to their platforms, and it is this addiction that is guiding how these platforms are designed. Without a responsible and balanced regulating framework that requires these companies to operate differently, they will continue to operate as they do now. AB 2408 is a bipartisan solution that seeks to provide this framework. This bill ensures that companies who knowingly create a platform that addicts children will be punished, but also provides reduced liability for companies who quarterly audit their practices, designs, and features to detect practices or features that have the potential to cause child addiction.

AB 2408 is a necessary first step to ensure the impacts of social media on mental health of our children are mitigated and prevented moving forward. There is no argument to allow social media companies to knowingly addict and harm our children. Inaction is unacceptable.

If you have any questions about my support for this measure, please feel free to contact me at (916) 445-2636; or your staff can reach my Assistant Deputy Controller for Legislative Affairs, Ben Triffo, at [btriffo@sco.ca.gov](mailto:btriffo@sco.ca.gov) or (916) 214-0570.

Sincerely,



BETTY T. YEE

cc: The Honorable Jordan Cunningham  
The Honorable Buffy Wicks  
Members, Senate Appropriations Committee

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<sup>3</sup> Sheera Frenkel & Cecilia Kang, Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg's Partnership Did Not Survive Trump (July 8, 2021) The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/08/business/mark-zuckerbergs-sheryl-sandberg-facebook.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Georgia Wells et al., Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show (September 14, 2021) The Wall Street Journal, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knowsinstagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knowsinstagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=article_inline).