

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Virtual Presser on Kids Online Safety
June 26, 2026

Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks
[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you for everybody joining us this afternoon. I want to specifically thank all the families who are here, because your advocacy continues to make a difference in this very important issue, and certainly a big shout out to a leader on kids' privacy legislation, my colleague Senator Blumenthal from Connecticut. So, glad that they're all here.

We're here to talk about what we can do to protect online privacy for children, and we want to talk about the Kids Online Safety Act, which passed the Senate with, I think, [a] 91 to 3 vote, and certainly has 76 co-sponsors in the Senate. So, when it comes to good, solid bipartisan legislation, there is a voice for that in the United States Senate.

I'm honored that we're joined today by four families who have experienced really what no families should ever have to experience: the loss of a child. For each of these families, that loss is a result of interactions with social media platforms and their children.

We are joined by Toney and Brandy Roberts, the parents of Englyn Roberts, who died at age 14. Englyn had been struggling with her own mental health during [the] COVID lockdown in 2020, and after her death, Toney and Brandy found that a friend had sent her a video on Instagram showing a woman participating in a simulated hanging. Without that video, Englyn might still be with us today.

Lori Schott is the mother of Annalee Schott, who also died by suicide at the age of 18. After her death, Lori and her husband, Avery, found video after video of young people sharing and at times glamorizing self-harm, self-hate on Annalee's phone. Many had tens of thousands of likes or more.

And Kristin Bride's son, Carson Bride, died by suicide at age 16 after being the victim of a very serious cyber bullying by his, quote, Snapchat friends—his high school classmates, who were using the anonymous apps Yolo and LMK on Snapchat to hide their identities. The last search on his phone before Carson ended his life was for hacks to find out the identities of these abusers.

Tricia Maciejewski is the mother of Levi, who was connected to a predator on Instagram the last day of summer. He was only 13 years old. Meta provided the predator with his follower and following lists, and after they threatened to send his compromising photos to everyone, Levi lost his life as a result of that threat.

I want to personally thank all these families for being so diligent in continuing to fight this fight. The pain must be immense, and yet you continue to share with all of us the knowledge and information that will help us stop these activities, because you are trying to save other lives. Thank you for doing that.

We're here today because the House of Representatives is scheduled next week on the [suspension] calendar, no less, to take up a package of bills related to kids online safety.

The bottom line is that this package has gutted many of the key provisions in the Senate bill necessary to protect kids and their families, and it is grouped with another set of bills that also fall short of showing what strong safety measures are needed for kids, and instead inserts many studies at a time when our government needs to do more than just study this problem.

The KIDS Act and the various bills are on this legislation – some have seen, as I said, action in the Senate, KOSA, which passed [91 to 3], and it is the reason why we're so concerned that the House of Representatives would take a weakened approach and gut much of that legislation and [their] ability to actually enforce the law.

I'm going to let Senator Blumenthal, since it's his legislation, talk about this more specifically, but [the KIDS Act] does narrow the platforms that are covered, leaving online gaming services out and a major form of kids' addiction.

It narrows the list of harms that platforms have to address, completely ignoring major problems like eating disorders, suicidal behavior, addiction, harassment, or diagnosed depression or anxiety, and replaces that with “reasonable policies,” which is very vague in creating a standard.

These are important because this language also includes preemption language that tilts the scale and makes it harder for parents to bring cases that hold social media companies accountable for dangerous design features.

For example, a jury in California recently found Meta and YouTube negligent in designing addictive features that harm the mental health of young users, and ordered the companies to pay the victims 3 million in damages.

Under the language in this bill, tech companies would argue the case was preempted, and a judge could have stopped that case before it was even being brought. Let me be clear: the Senate is not interested in having these cases preempted. We are for a strong federal statute, and we are for states continuing to play a role.

These types of cases are so far the only ones successfully holding the platforms accountable for designing dangerous products, and maybe that is why someone has come to the House of Representatives to sneak language in that would get these cases tossed out.

Let me be clear: no one is for tossing out these cases. We should not make it harder for parents to have to convince a court that they deserve to enter the courtroom and get justice that they deserve.

So we need a strong KOSA bill, and I also want to mention, while I said there were several other study bills, the Spy Kids Act that is also on this agenda is a slightly different version of the same “product improvement” loophole that we've seen in privacy legislation for decades.

It seeks to prohibit only “market or product research,” and has a knowledge standard that is too weak, actual knowledge or willful disregard, [raising] the burden on the parents. It appears to assume transparency where there is none and appears to be silent on the use of data for AI training.

I can later, when we get into the Q&A, answer any questions about that if people want to hear more about why that is so important, and why that particular proposal is not the solution that we see.

Now, I'd like to introduce Senator Blumenthal – again, my colleague from Connecticut, a true leader on kids online privacy, [and] the successful champion of moving a strong bill out of the United States Senate. Richard, the floor is yours.

Toney and Brandy Roberts Opening Remarks

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Dick.

We're now going to hear from Brandy and Toney Roberts, the parents of Englyn. Thank you so much.

Brandy Roberts: Hi. Thank you for having this call with us all today.

This is our daughter, Englyn, who is forever 14. Englyn was a vibrant, outgoing, smart 14-year-old girl who had an infectious laugh. She enjoyed getting her nails done, especially with her dad. She enjoyed cookouts. She would change outfits two or three times during those family cookouts because she was so into fashion. She had dreams of opening up her studio one day, but six years ago on September 7, we found our baby girl and our family was shattered that day. She didn't leave us because she didn't love this earth. She was stolen from us by the calculated algorithms designed to hook her and addict her and feed her darkest vulnerabilities.

As parents, Toney and I thought we were doing everything we were possibly capable of doing; we locked the doors, we checked who her friends were, but behind closed doors in her own bedroom these algorithms were feeding her things that she didn't ask for. She was entering that digital hellscape.

[W]e're not asking for sorrow because that won't bring our baby girl back, but what we're asking is for these platforms to be held accountable for what they know they are doing to kids and maybe protect kids like Englyn from being harmed any further. And I'm going to turn it over to my husband to talk about what should be done.

Toney Roberts: Good morning, and thanks everybody for helping and fighting for change, and for families to not go through what we're all going through.

I want to read something to you that I've read many times, and most times I can't get through it, but I think it's so important as it relates to the duty of care that the Senate passed in the summer of 2024, 91 to 3. That duty of care is so needed when you hear this.

This note was locked on Englyn's phone, and I found it about a month after she passed, as well as pictures of her cutting herself. The video that was spoken about that her and her friends actually exchanged. Those algorithms sent that to those girls' phones and they simply exchanged them because they thought they were funny. That particular account was deleted in December of '21 on Instagram, but right around 12 o'clock central time -- I keep notes -- and this particular person who posted the original video has 20 + Instagram accounts, and I just found that video on 11 of her 20 accounts, 20 plus accounts, so it is still there, still being fed to children, still there for everyone to see.

So, they don't have a duty of care, they don't have a responsibility. This is why the duty of care, the Senate version of KOSA is desperately needed, so other children, other families won't have to endure what we're talking about and what we're feeling every single day.

It was on Englyn's phone; she titled it Emotional Description: "It's only what the media sees, I show people what they want to see, but behind the social media life, nobody knows the real me, and how much I struggle to make sure everyone's good, even though I'm not. If it's not one thing, it's another. And when things are going wrong for me, I just become so suicidal. I just need that emotional support. I don't want anyone feeling bad for me; just to support my choices I make in life. I want somebody to help me through my mental struggle, because if no one's there, who do I have?"

So, if this is not enough for everybody in Congress to do the right damn thing and pass the Senate version of KOSA to hold these platforms accountable by their intentional design choices—I don't know what is.

But the day that they may have to go to church and listen to those church bells ring when you're burying your child because of something that is completely avoidable – I don't know what else to say.

We shouldn't have to sit here today, I don't know how many times, to tell the stories of our children that are no longer here to hug and to care for other individuals, because believe me, when people say to us, 'Where were the parents?' Hell, we're still right here, we're fighting for other families and children not to go through what we're going through, and we will do it until He calls us home to meet our children.

Sen. Cantwell: Toney and Brandy, thank you. Thank you so much.

Lori Schott Opening Remarks

[VIDEO]

Lori Schott: Hi. Thank you Senator Cantwell. Thank you Senator Blumenthal. My name is Lori Schott. I am here because I lost our beautiful 18-year-old daughter Annalee to the harms of social media.

Annalee was a rural Colorado farm girl. She loved her horses, her faith, her family. Annalee wasn't born believing she wasn't good enough. Annalee wasn't born believing she wasn't pretty enough, and Anna Lee was definitely not born believing she had no future. Those beliefs were planted over time by social media platforms that pulled her into a mental health war within herself.

In 2020, we were those parents trying to navigate a digital world we did not fully understand. Like millions of American families, we believed social media companies when they said these platforms were helpful for young people to connect with friends, express themselves, and find community. But behind big tech's closed doors, these companies designed products to maximize engagement, increase screen time and keep our children coming back, not because it was healthy, but because it was profitable.

We didn't know we were parenting against products intentionally engineered to compete with us every single minute she was online. After Annalee died, we discovered what really happened behind the scenes. She had downloaded TikTok, the one platform we had specifically told her she

could not have. We discovered multiple hidden social media accounts. Only after her death did we understand what the recommendation algorithms had been feeding her.

We learned she was sent a live suicide video on TikTok. We learned that TikTok and Instagram had been repeatedly pushing content that fueled unhealthy comparisons about beauty and self-worth. We learned she was quietly carrying a burden inside her heart she never shared, because social media convinced her that her parents were the obstacles between her and the platforms.

Annalee's journals are her voice now. She wrote, "I am sitting here telling myself how much I hate myself. Nobody's going to love me unless I look the part. I look at other girls' profiles and it makes me feel worse. How could somebody love somebody as ugly and broken as me? Technically, if I kill myself, all my problems would be gone."

That was pushed to her from TikTok. Those were not the words of my little girl that we raised. Those were the words of a young girl whose self-worth had been destroyed over time. The recommendation systems learned her vulnerabilities and kept her hooked, sleep-deprived, and force-fed her more of what deepened her hopelessness.

On the day Annalee died, she left us a note that said, "I love my family. Don't be sad for me. It's not you, it's me. I have no future." Congress now knows what parents like me did not know.

[Since] 2020, I have spent weeks in the courtroom seeing the evidence that exposed how these products were designed and how engagement-driven business models operated behind closed doors. These companies, not families like ours, they were the ones found liable. Parents like me are here to fight for the strongest laws possible. That is why I cannot support the House KIDS Act.

The evidence uncovered in the courtrooms in LA and New Mexico should have become the blueprint for Congress. Instead [the KIDS Act] creates opportunities for companies to argue around responsibility. It weakens protections against addictive design, and it creates additional barriers for families to find accountability.

Parents like me will not support the House KIDS Act, but we will support the Senate version of the Kids Online Safety Act. The testimony, the internal documents, the whistleblowers, and the verdicts have exposed what these companies knew about the risk to children and the choices they made.

Today, Congress should write the law that the evidence from our courtrooms now demands, not the big tech law that they prefer. Thank you.

Kristin Bride Opening Remarks

[VIDEO]

Kristin Bride: Thank you, Senator Cantwell and Senator Blumenthal. I lost my 16-year-old son Carson to suicide six years ago this week. Carson brightened everyone's day with his sense of humor, his smile, laughter, tight hugs and now our family lives with a hole in our hearts forever.

We were conservative parents with technology. We waited until he was 16 to give him his first smartphone, an old hand-me-down with no social media apps. But when he got to high school, he

begged for Snapchat, because that was the way all the kids were connecting. He was in 10th grade then and he didn't live to see 11th grade.

Unbeknownst to us, Snapchat had allowed anonymous apps on their platform. These apps allow teens to publicly target an individual while remaining anonymous. They have been around for over a decade and have always led to teenage cyber bullying, usually a suicide; they shut down and another one comes to market.

It is a dangerous and deadly product design; the app developers know it. Yet, it is perfect for creating online drama, more young eyes on screens, and ultimately mounting profits for social media companies. In the weeks leading to Carson's suicide, he received nearly 100 humiliating, sexually explicit and threatening messages from his high school classmates, who were hiding their identities behind the anonymous app YOLO.

The app promised young users that they would monitor cyber bullying and reveal and ban users who did so. Yet, the last search on Carson's phone before he hung himself, while our family slept, was for hacks to find out who was doing this to him.

Why would Carson need to do this if the app worked the way that it promised? It is because Snapchat allowed this app on its platform that never had the ability to monitor for cyber bullying. There was one single YOLO employee and 10 million users.

There were no safeguards for this product and the harm from this product that ended my son's life was absolutely foreseeable. This is not safety by design for kids; this is dangerous by design for profit.

For the last four years, I have told the painful story of losing my son repeatedly to the Senate and House offices to pass the Kids Online Safety Act, KOSA. It is worth it, because at the heart of this bill is the duty of care, something that every American industry is held to when they are creating their products, except Big Tech.

American families and our Congressional leaders should not accept anything less than the standards in KOSA, the original Kids Online Safety Act, with its duty of care legally requiring tech companies to put kids' safety first when designing their products. The House KIDS Act is a slap in the face to all the parents who have fought so hard for years to pass meaningful legislation to protect kids online.

It is no coincidence that the word safety is not included in the House KIDS Act -- in both name and substance, because this bill explicitly states that Big Tech does not have a duty of care to our children, and they can create and monitor their own safety policies. This is clearly not working.

As a six-year parent survivor and advocate, executive director of the Carson J. Bright Effect and founding member of Parents Rise, the first grassroots parent survivor led nonprofit, I strongly oppose the KIDS Act, because it doesn't protect our children, it protects Big Tech.

A bill like the KIDS Act is worse than having no bill at all. Thank you.

Tricia Maciejewski Opening Remarks

[VIDEO]

Tricia Maciejewski: Thank you, Senators, for the opportunity to share my son, Levi, and my thoughts.

In the summer of 2024, when Kristin and Brandy and Lori were fighting for KOSA and it passed the Senate 91 to 3 – Levi was still here, happy, healthy, playing baseball, golf, riding his bike on the trail with his friends.

That failed bill could have saved him. What took my son's life was preventable. It didn't have to be this way. As parents, we rely on companies to make products safe by design. Whether it's car seats or batting helmets, their safety is our utmost concern.

My boys had smart phones, like most teenagers, and I presumed that same duty of care, because Meta and other product manufacturers created an illusion of safety.

I was the mom of two teenage boys – both responsible, intelligent, athletic, well connected, and full of light. They were growing up in the digital age. My husband and I had device guidelines, parent controls, and screen time limits in place.

It was August of 2024 and Levi was just 13. He requested Instagram on a Sunday evening. Two days later, on Tuesday morning, he laid out his back-to-school outfit and had his Chromebook charging beside his bed. Also, sometime that morning, he was connected to a bad actor on Instagram because there are currently no guardrails in place, and Levi was dead by lunchtime. He was the victim of financial sextortion and his death was ruled a homicide.

The user experience that Levi wanted and the one that he got could not have been more different. I've since learned that Meta knew that these dangers existed and they chose to do nothing. Meta puts profit over people.

Whistleblowers have come forward. Survivor parents were trying desperately to be heard. Meta continued to operate with immunity and Congress continued to hold hearings.

The House is trying to pass a bad bill. A bad bill will only add to the illusion of safety, because then parents will trust that their kids are safer. If there is no duty of care, there's nothing. Children are the future of our country. Their safety, their wellness should not be a topic of debate.

No parent would ever willingly compromise the safety of their child. So, why is Congress compromising? There is no place for agendas, alliances, and contradicting language. There's been a human cost to Congress's indecision. Englyn, Anna[lee], Carson, Levi, and hundreds of other children deserved better.

Kids need the strongest protections available. They need the safety to be children. No more predators, dangerous content, or the disruption to our homes and our classrooms. Inaction is altering childhood.

I always taught my boys, when you know better, you do better. It is time for Congress to do their absolute best for children. Thank you.