



## MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

S.7694 (Gounardes) – A.8148 (Rozić)

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We, the undersigned twenty-six organizations across New York State, strongly support two bills essential to safeguarding the well-being of minors online: The SAFE for Kids Act (S.7694 Gounardes/A.8148 Rozić) and the New York Child Data Protection Act (S.7695 Gounardes/A.8149 Rozić).

As professionals dedicated to the well-being and safety of children, we are acutely aware of the indelible negative impacts on children’s mental health associated with the manipulation of their personal data online and the intentional addictive nature of social media. In May 2023, the US Surgeon General issued an Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health stressing the harms of social media on the mental health of young people and the urgent need for policy intervention. We join in the call for immediate action in light of increasingly alarming statistics.

Research shows that youth who spend more than three hours a day on social media double their risk for depression and anxiety. More than half of teens say that social media makes them feel worse about their body image. The average time young people spend online is nine hours per day, leading to disrupted sleep cycles, poor self-esteem, and reduced engagement in necessary activities for healthy development. Multiple studies demonstrate a direct correlation between the explosion of social media and a rise in the rates of self-harm, anxiety and depression, and suicide amongst children and teens.

The need for legislative action is now. The SAFE for Kids Act and the New York Child Data Protection Act serve to balance the independence and autonomy of the child with the need to ensure that these platforms are not being designed in a way to purposefully addict minors. Specifically, the SAFE for Kids Act, *inter alia*, turns off addictive feeds and overnight

notifications by default, and the New York Child Data Protection Act bars operators from collecting and selling children's data without consent.

The SAFE for Kids Act and the New York Child Data Protection Act afford the Legislature the ripe occasion to take meaningful action at a pivotal time in history where the online exploitation of children has risen in tandem with the decline of their mental health. These bills will help protect our children online and better allow for healthy social and emotional development. Acting on these bills will directly affect the future of our youth and state. The online protections afforded by these bills will contribute towards reduced exposure of harmful social media content to minors, lessening its unintended harms and promoting digital well-being.

For these reasons, we urge the Legislature to pass The SAFE for Kids Act (S.7694/A.8148) and the New York Child Data Protection Act (S.7695/ A.8149). Inaction is not an option.