



March 11, 2025

New York Legislature
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear New York State lawmakers,

On behalf of Common Sense Media, the largest organization in the country dedicated to helping kids and families lead healthier digital lives, and the 80,000 teachers, parents, and other supporters in New York affiliated with our organization, we write in strong support of Governor Hochul's "bell to bell" distraction-free schools proposal as well as several other critical proposals under consideration by the legislature this year to make the internet healthier and safer for kids, teens and all New Yorkers. We list those proposals below.

Common Sense Media's research in 2024 revealed that smartphone distractions significantly impact academic performance and student well-being. Nearly 70% of teens report that social media distracts them from schoolwork, and other studies have consistently found negative correlations between classroom phone use and academic achievement. Other research shows that teens who spend more than three hours a day on social media double their risk for depression and anxiety, and multiple studies demonstrate that the explosion of social media use has contributed to a rise in the rates of self-harm, anxiety, depression, and suicide among children and teens. Families will always play a key role in managing their children's digital lives but they cannot do it alone. Just ask any parent. They need the State of New York on their side.

Governor Hochul's fiscal 2025 budget proposal to restrict K-12 students' access to cell phones during the entirety of the school day is good for students and their families. Along with the New York State United Teachers and other organizations in the state, we strongly support this proposal, including allowing for flexibility relating to implementation at the school district level and the requirement to maintain appropriate exceptions for students with disabilities or other health-related special circumstances. The evidence is clear and the consensus is palpable: smartphones in classrooms disrupt learning environments in New York and across the country. Governor Hochul's proposal supports students' mental health, academic success, and overall well-being — not by eliminating technology, but by creating spaces where students can fully engage with learning and with their peers.

The Governor's distraction-free schools proposal specifically covers the entire school day - "bell to bell" - and we urge you to retain this component of the proposal to ensure the plan delivers the best results for students and educators across New York.

We also encourage the governor and the legislature to ensure that New York schools provide professional development training, student instruction, and family engagement programming that supports digital literacy/citizenship instruction focused on safe, ethical, and responsible use of technology. Governor Hochul's "bell to bell" cell phone policy is the perfect time to also ensure that when students do have access to their devices they are better educated on how to have a healthier and safer experience.

We also strongly support two other items in Governor Hochul's proposed budget, one to reduce harms to children from AI companions, a serious but less widely known threat from emerging technology, and the other to make it illegal to use AI to create child sexual abuse material in New York.

And last, but certainly not least, we encourage New York state to build on your important victories last year in making the internet healthier and safer for kids and teens when the state legislature passed and Governor Hochul signed into law the SAFE for Kids Act and the New York Child Data Protection Act, two bills that Common Sense Media strongly supported. This year, Common Sense is supporting several new bills, as you can see in our [attached list of priorities](#), and we urge the legislature to pass these bills. They include:

- **Warning Labels for Addictive Social Media Platforms Act** (S4505/A5346, Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Rozic) requires social media platforms with addictive design features to provide **clear and persistent labels** about the potential mental health risks from too much social media use, similar to warnings for other addictive products, like alcohol and tobacco.
- **New York Children's Online Safety Act (NYCOSA)** (S4609, Senator Gounardes) limits how strangers interact with minors on social media and gaming platforms with chat functions. These restrictions would include direct messaging, profile visibility, and financial transactions.
- **Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation (SAFE) for All Act** (S4506, Senator Gounardes) gives all New Yorkers **more** control over their social media use by allowing them to limit addictive design features like algorithmic feeds, autoplay, and excessive screen time.

Common Sense has always recognized the valuable role of technology in modern education and life, and we aim to help schools and families create environments where technology enhances rather than disrupts learning. When up against addictive devices, it is clear that students and families cannot achieve this goal on their own.

We look forward to working with Governor Hochul and State Lawmakers to put new safeguards in place to help kids, teens, and all New Yorkers thrive.

Sincerely,



James P. Steyer
Founder and CEO
Common Sense Media

Cc: Honorable Kathy Hochul