February 15, 2024

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Blumenthal,

On behalf of the organizations signed below, we would like to thank you for hearing our concerns about the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) and updating the legislation to address potential adverse consequences for LGBTQ+ youth.

It is increasingly evident that the rise in social media has been associated with alarming trends in youth mental health, including for LGBTQ+ young people. We commend you and your colleagues for working to address these problems, including the increases in anxiety, depression, suicidality, and eating disorders that research consistently shows disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ youth.

However, for LGBTQ+ young people, social media has also created incredible opportunities and support, including access to resources, education, and affirming spaces that they may not have anywhere else in their lives. For young people in the process of finding themselves or who feel isolated in unsupportive families, these connections have been vital.

This is a nuanced and rapidly evolving area and there are no easy answers to regulating social media, but it is crucial that any legislation does not risk harming vulnerable young people, especially at a time when safe and affirming spaces are increasingly under attack.

When KOSA was first introduced, we had serious concerns that this bill could open the door to bad actors weaponizing the law to suppress affirming content for LGBTQ+ young people. Some early supporters of KOSA even touted that this is how they intended to use the law.

The considerable changes that you have proposed to KOSA in the draft released on February 15, 2024, significantly mitigate the risk of it being misused to suppress LGBTQ+ resources or stifle young people’s access to online communities. As such, if this draft of the bill moves forward, our organizations will not oppose its passage.

This is a new area of lawmaking and there will be ongoing debate as to the best approach to protecting children from harm online, but we are grateful to you for diligently engaging with our community to address these concerns and ensuring that the mental health needs of all young people, including LGBTQ+ youth, are taken into account. We look forward to continuing to be a resource as these discussions continue.

Sincerely,

GLAAD
GLSEN
Human Rights Campaign
PFLAG National
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
The Trevor Project