

Opinion / Editorial

Dr. Tom’s Cyber Bits & TipsSouth Carolina Bans Addictive Social Media Features for Users Under 16

By Dr. Thomas Hyslip

Gov. Henry McMaster has signed a new state law that will strip autoplay videos, infinite scrolling, push notifications and like counts from the social media accounts of South Carolina users younger than 16. The measure was championed by state Rep. Brandon Guffey, a York County Republican whose teenage son died by suicide after an online sextortion scam.

The law, called the Stop Harm from Addictive Social Media Act, aims to protect the mental health of children by cutting off design features the state considers addictive and by giving parents more control over how their

children use major platforms. For families across York and Lancaster Counties, it means the largest social media companies will soon have to identify younger users in South Carolina, change what those accounts can do and seek a parent’s permission before a child can keep an account.

A York County lawmaker leads the effort

Guffey, who lives in Rock Hill, has pushed for stronger online protections for children since his son Gavin, who was 17, died by suicide in July 2022. Guffey has said a stranger posing as a young woman on Instagram coerced



Dr. Thomas Hyslip

Gavin into sending intimate images, then tried to extort him for money. After his son’s death, Guffey sponsored Gavin’s Law, the 2023 measure that made sexual extortion a felony in South Carolina. He has since carried that advocacy to Congress and the White House.

Guffey has described social media companies as “the big tobacco of this generation” and has said he hopes the new state law becomes a model for the rest of the country.

What the law changes

For account holders younger than 16, the law bans a set of features it labels addictive, including continuously loading feeds known as infinite scrolling, autoplay videos, push notifications alerting users to new content, and content metrics such as like counts. Those restrictions apply even when a parent has given consent. The law also prohibits targeted advertising to children and younger teens and adds privacy requirements for how platforms handle minors’ personal information. Parents will be able to monitor and limit the amount of time their children spend on covered platforms.

How age estimation would work

Rather than requiring users to upload a government identification, the law directs covered platforms to estimate the age of account holders based on their activity and the birthdate tied to the account. A covered platform is defined as a company that generated at least \$1 billion in advertising revenue worldwide in one or more of the preceding three years, a threshold that captures platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

A platform must begin estimating a user’s age after the account has been active for a set number of hours, then refine that estimate as use continues. According to written testimony NetChoice submitted in opposition, platforms would have to estimate within 14 days of a user reaching 25 hours of use over six months whether that user is older than 17, with 80 percent confidence, and raise that confidence to 90 percent once the account reaches 50 hours. Accounts that have been active for seven or more years are exempt from the age estimation requirement. The law creates a private right of action for affected families and allows penalties of \$10,000 per violation.

Industry pushes back

NetChoice, a trade group whose members include Meta, Google, TikTok and YouTube, opposed the bill as it moved through the General Assembly. Amy Bos, a vice president for the group, argued that the measure violates free speech protections and functions as a digital identification mandate that could put children’s data at greater risk. NetChoice has already sued the state over a separate law McMaster signed Feb. 5 aimed at minors online, the South Carolina Age Appropriate Design Code Act. That case, NetChoice v. Wilson, is pending in federal court on First and Fourteenth Amendment grounds.

When the law takes effect

The Stop Harm from Addictive Social Media Act cleared the General Assembly with broad bipartisan support and was signed May 19. It is scheduled to take effect Jan. 1, 2027, leaving the largest platforms about seven months to build the age estimation systems the law requires.

Whether the law survives a likely legal challenge remains an open

Family & Marriage

F a t h e r ’ s D a y

“Becoming a dad is one thing; being a dad is many things.” – Steve Chapman

“Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.” – Bible (Proverbs 4:1-2)

The role of a father has undergone significant changes over the past 50 years. For many years the United States has been predominantly a Christian nation. The traditional family consisted of a father, mother, and their biological or adopted children living together in a single house. The father served as the primary breadwinner and decision-maker, while the mother managed domestic responsibilities and child-rearing. This structure often emphasized a lifelong partnership, with clearly defined gender roles. The father was a male, and the mother was female.

This concept of the family has evolved over time, influenced by many changes in our society, including confusing sexual roles, economic factors, and cultural shifts. While the traditional family structure is still most common, that “traditional” structure has undergone many changes to adapt to the realities of modern life. Here are some key factors that have influenced the evolution of the traditional family: Changing gender roles. More women are pursuing careers, leading to a more balanced distribution of household responsibilities. Men are more willing to accept that their wife is in the workplace, and as a result to take a more significant role in the home. Both parents often share financial responsibilities. Diverse family structures. The acceptance of diverse family

structures, such as single-parent families, blended families, and same-sex families, has expanded the definition of family beyond the traditional model.

Economic pressures: Economic factors, such as the rising cost of living and the need for dual incomes, have reshaped this family. Parents often share financial responsibilities and caregiving duties. Work must be balanced with family needs. Failure to do so can result in significant stress for the whole family. Social isolation. Too much focus on the family can sometimes lead to social isolation, with fewer connections to extended family and community support networks. Although family involvement in the church is very important and offers many opportunities for connecting and working with others, it too can sometimes isolate one from those outside the family’s own church. Now that we have focused on the big picture, let’s consider one little insidious device that is in every household, and usually in every hand. I don’t mean the TV, although that can certainly be a distraction. I that pint-sized instrument we all carry with us all the time: the cellphone.

Therapist Andrew Sofin says “Smartphones have caused more upheaval than anything I have seen in my career. We’ve normalized them being intrusive and taking precedence when people are lying in bed, playing Wordle, or scrolling through TikTok rather than talking with each other.” A study by the Institute for Family Studies found that 37 percent of married Americans say when they want to interact with their spouse, they are likely to find them either on the phone or scrolling the internet or planning a game on their device. “Most alarmingly, 26 percent of those



Roger Rollins, Family and Marriage Coalition

who report excessive phone use think their marriage could end in divorce in the near or distant future, all thanks to a small handheld device that was supposed to bring us together rather than pull us apart.” (Institute for Family Studies)

Most of us have cellphones. Here are some questions to ponder. Have we established guidelines for our family on using cellphones when in the house? Do we sincerely try to minimize the use of cellphones in the house? When someone asks a question or is trying to tell us something, do we set the cellphone aside for the moment and focus our full attention on the person who is speaking? Do we establish guidelines on how our children are using their cellphone? There are controls we can put in place if we make the effort.

Above all, do we as parents, and particularly, the father take the lead in the proper use of cellphones, and in connecting with one another?

Family and Marriage Coalition of Aiken (FAMCO) was created to provide resources for you to succeed in your marriage and families. Roger Rollins, Executive Director, FAMCO, 803-640-4689. Let us know how we can help.



question, given the pending case over the state’s earlier measure. For now, families in York and Lancaster Counties have until the start of next year before the changes reach their children’s screens.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available by call or text at 988.

Sources: South Carolina House Bill 4591, the Stop Harm from Addictive Social Media Act, as posted by the South Carolina Legislature; the Office of Gov. Henry McMaster; written testimony submitted by NetChoice; the Alliance Defending Freedom; and reporting by The Associated Press, WIS News 10 and Live 5 News.

Feeling lost in the digital world? Dr. Tom is here to help!

Join Dr. Tom every week in his column, Dr. Tom’s Cyber Bits and Tips, for byte-sized advice on all things cyber and tech. Whether you’re concerned about online safety, curious about the latest cybercrime trends, or simply want to navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape, Dr. Tom has you covered.

From practical cybersecurity tips to insightful breakdowns of current threats, Dr. Tom’s column empowers you to stay informed and protect yourself online. So, dive in and get savvy with the web – with Dr. Tom as your guide!

CLUES ACROSS

1. Similar

4. Have an ambitious plan or a lofty goal

10. No (Scottish)

11. ___ Aires, city

12. Morning

14. Senior’s son (abbr.)

15. A notable achievement

16. European nation

18. Endings

22. Puts into place

23. Former

24. Grenadier

26. Sea patrol

27. Algerian port

28. Norwegian river

30. Precipitation

31. Sunscreen rating

34. New York is one
36. Patti Hearst’s captors

37. Soft mineral with greasy feel

39. Retired Brazilian footballer

40. An Indian nursemaid

41. Atomic #24

42. Immobile

48. Insignia of royalty

50. Seeds from which chocolate is made

51. Begin again

52. Round root

53. Beginning to end (alt. sp.)

54. What newlyweds just said

55. Empire State

56. Give back

58. College hoops tournament

59. Unstable situations

60. Young women’s association

CLUES DOWN

1. Administer a drug

2. Holy places

3. Contrary opinions

4. Blood type

5. Gags

6. Micturating

7. Silly

8. A type of “cuff”

9. Spanish be

12. Austrian river

13. Messenger ribonucleic acid

17. Consume food

19. California supermarket

20. Electronic communication

21. Cassia tree

25. Written works
29. Cool!

31. Noteworthy 90s lawyer Kenneth

32. One who was compensated

33. National symbols

35. Raising

38. A type of talk

41. Cloud

43. Middle Eastern peoples

44. Pouches

45. 007’s creator

46. A cut of meat

47. Sports entertainment award

49. Christine __, actress

56. Relief organization (abbr.)

57. Canadian province (abbr.)



SUDOKU

			8			1		3
			3					8
				1		2		
		6			8			5
	1	4	2					
			3		9			
			5				7	
		2					1	
8	9			7		3		

Level: Intermediate

Here’s How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

2	2	3	3	1	7	4	5	8
4	5	1	4	6	8	6	2	7
9	1	5	3	2	5	8	1	9
4	2	4	2	4	9	3	7	5
9	8	6	7	5	2	4	2	3
5	3	7	8	1	4	8	9	2
7	5	2	3	1	1	9	6	8
8	6	9	4	2	4	3	7	1
3	5	1	4	3	8	9	5	1

ANSWER: