



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
FIRST REGULAR SESSION



HOUSE BILL NO. 9963

Introduced by Representatives
ZIAUR-RAHMAN "ZIA" ALONTO ADIONG

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A MINIMUM AGE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE,
REGULATING CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS,
PRESCRIBING OBLIGATIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM
PROVIDERS AND THIRD-PARTY AGE VERIFICATION PROVIDERS,
PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and mandates the State to promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. It likewise directs the State to defend the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development.

Children now grow up in a digital environment where communication, entertainment, education, and social participation are increasingly mediated by social media platforms. While social media may provide access to information, peer support, and community, premature and unregulated exposure may also subject children to harmful content, online exploitation, cyberbullying, compulsive use, disrupted sleep, digital distraction, privacy risks, and algorithmically amplified material unsuitable for their age and stage of development.

Recent Philippine medical opinion reinforces the urgency of legislative action. Pediatric and developmental-behavioral specialists have warned against unsupervised social media use by children aged sixteen (16) years old and below. The Philippine Pediatric Society has recommended that children in this age group should not be allowed unsupervised access to social media. The Philippine Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics has likewise expressed support for stronger safeguards, noting that clinicians encounter young patients experiencing anxiety, emotional dysregulation, sleep disturbances, and worsening behavioral and developmental symptoms associated with unregulated social media use.

This concern is supported by recent international evidence. The United States Surgeon General has warned that children and adolescents who spend more than three (3) hours a day on social media face twice the risk of mental health problems, including symptoms of depression and anxiety. The American Psychological Association has also advised that social media use in early adolescence should be subject to adult monitoring, developmentally appropriate limits, and safeguards against harmful content, addictive design features, and interference with sleep and physical activity.

A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, covering 143 studies and more than one million adolescents, found a positive association between social media use and internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression. A 2022 *Nature Communications* study found developmental windows during adolescence when higher social media use predicted lower life satisfaction one year later, particularly among girls aged eleven (11) to thirteen (13), boys aged fourteen (14) to fifteen (15), and youth aged nineteen (19). These findings support the need for special safeguards during early and middle adolescence, when self-regulation, impulse control, identity formation, and peer sensitivity are still developing.

Global public health data also show increasing concern over problematic social media use. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe reported in 2024 that problematic social media use among adolescents rose from seven percent (7%) in 2018 to eleven percent (11%) in 2022, with more than one in ten adolescents showing addiction-like symptoms such as inability to control use, withdrawal, neglect of other activities, and negative consequences in daily life. Education data likewise show that unmanaged digital-device use affects learning environments. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, using PISA 2022 data, reported that students who spend more than one hour per weekday on leisure digital activities, including browsing social networks and sharing digital content, tend to score lower in mathematics and report more distraction.

The Philippine context makes this measure even more urgent. The 2024 National Information and Communications Technology Household Survey shows that a significant number of children aged ten (10) to sixteen (16) already use the internet, with many accessing it daily or almost daily and maintaining social media accounts. Earlier UNICEF-supported research on children's online experiences in the Philippines found that social media dominates children's internet use, with many children equating the internet itself with social media. The same research observed that children need more age-appropriate online content and stronger guidance in finding and using such content safely.

More serious online harms have also been documented. The 2022 *Disrupting Harm in the Philippines* report found that many Filipino children do not know how to report harmful content or where to seek help when subjected to online sexual harassment or abuse. It also reported that online child sexual exploitation and abuse commonly occurs through digital and social media channels. These findings show that reliance on parental supervision alone is insufficient. The burden of child protection must also fall on platforms that design, operate, and profit from digital environments used by children.

Existing laws, including Republic Act No. 7610, or the "Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act," as amended, and Republic Act No. 11930, or the "Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act," provide important protections against abuse and exploitation, including those committed through digital means. Republic Act No. 10173, or the "Data Privacy Act of 2012," likewise protects personal

information, including the personal information of children. However, these statutes are primarily protective, penal, or remedial in nature. They do not yet establish a comprehensive preventive framework regulating children's access to social media platforms before harm occurs.

This bill seeks to fill that gap by establishing a minimum age of sixteen (16) years for social media use, requiring social media platform providers to implement reliable and privacy-protective age-verification mechanisms, mandating child-safety and content-control tools, limiting design features that promote compulsive or excessive use, and directing the Department of Information and Communications Technology to monitor compliance. It also ensures coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Education, National Telecommunications Commission, National Privacy Commission, Council for the Welfare of Children, and other relevant stakeholders.

This measure does not treat technology as inherently harmful. Rather, it recognizes that children are entitled to age-appropriate digital environments, that social media platforms must be made accountable for risks built into their systems, and that the State has a constitutional duty to protect children's physical, mental, moral, and social well-being. The bill adopts a preventive, child-centered, and rights-based approach consistent with the best interests of the child, freedom of expression, privacy, and the State's duty to protect children from conditions prejudicial to their development.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.



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1st District, Lanao del Sur



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SECTION 1. Short Title. — This Act shall be known as the "LIGTAS NA SOCIAL MEDIA PARA SA MGA BATA ACT"

SECTION 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is the policy of the State to promote and protect the physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being of the youth. The State shall provide special protection to children from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development.

Towards this end, the State shall adopt preventive measures to regulate minors' exposure to social media, minimize distractions from mobile devices and electronic gadgets, protect children from online harm, promote age-appropriate digital environments, and support safe learning and child development.

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. — For purposes of this Act:

- (a) Age-restricted user refers to a child who is fifteen (15) years of age or under;
- (b) Child refers to any person below eighteen (18) years of age;
- (c) Social media platform refers to any internet-based service, application, website, or computer program primarily intended to enable online social interaction among users, including the creation or maintenance of user accounts or profiles, content sharing, and interaction with content or other users;
- (d) Social media platform provider refers to any person or entity that owns, manages, controls, or operates a social media platform made available to users in the Philippines;

(e) Third-party age verification provider refers to any person or entity engaged by a social media platform provider to verify the age or identity of users for purposes of compliance with this Act; and

(f) Age verification mechanism refers to a reliable, proportionate, and privacy-protective system, process, or technology used to determine whether a user meets the minimum age requirement under this Act.

SECTION 4. Minimum Age Requirement for Social Media Use. — Children fifteen (15) years of age and younger shall be prohibited from registering, accessing, or maintaining accounts on any social media platform covered by this Act.

Social media platform providers shall implement reliable age-verification mechanisms to enforce the minimum age requirement.

No social media platform provider shall knowingly allow an age-restricted user to register, access, or maintain an account on its platform.

SECTION 5. Duties of Social Media Platform Providers. — Social media platform providers shall:

(a) Adopt effective, proportionate, and privacy-protective age and identity verification systems, which may include ID authentication, facial recognition, or comparable technologies, subject to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and other applicable laws;

(b) Conduct regular audits to detect and deactivate accounts held, operated, or used by age-restricted users;

(c) Prevent circumvention of age restrictions through duplicate, false, or reactivated accounts;

(d) Provide functional parental control and content-filtering tools;

(e) Establish prompt, accessible, and child-sensitive reporting and response mechanisms for underage access and other violations of this Act;

(f) Ensure that platform design does not promote compulsive or excessive use by children, including through autoplay features, addictive notifications, or algorithmic recommendations directed at age-restricted users;

(g) Maintain internal records sufficient to demonstrate compliance with this Act, subject to applicable data protection requirements; and

(h) Submit compliance reports to the Department of Information and Communications Technology in the form, frequency, and manner prescribed in the implementing rules and regulations.

SECTION 6. Duties of Third-Party Age Verification Providers. — Third-party age verification providers engaged by social media platform providers shall:

(a) Use age-verification methods that are accurate, reliable, secure, and proportionate to the purposes of this Act;

(b) Process personal information only to the extent necessary for age or identity verification;

(c) Refrain from using personal information collected under this Act for advertising, profiling, marketing, or any purpose unrelated to age or identity verification;

(d) Implement reasonable and appropriate organizational, physical, and technical safeguards to protect personal information; and

(e) Comply with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and issuances of the National Privacy Commission.

SECTION 7. Role of the Department of Information and Communications Technology. — The Department of Information and Communications Technology shall be the primary implementing agency of this Act. It shall:

(a) Monitor the compliance of social media platform providers and third-party age verification providers with the minimum age requirement and other obligations under this Act;

(b) Establish accessible reporting mechanisms for violations of this Act;

(c) Conduct investigations, *motu proprio* or upon complaint, on alleged violations of this Act;

(d) Issue compliance orders and disabling orders in accordance with this Act and its implementing rules and regulations;

(e) Impose administrative sanctions and penalties under this Act;

(f) Coordinate with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Education, National Telecommunications Commission, National Privacy Commission, Council for the Welfare of Children, and other relevant government agencies; and

(g) Conduct awareness campaigns and community-based programs on responsible social media use, digital safety, and digital well-being.

SECTION 8. Disabling Orders and Network-Level Enforcement. — Upon determination that a social media account is owned, operated, or used by an age-restricted user in violation of this Act, the Department of Information and Communications Technology shall issue a Disabling Order directing the immediate removal, suspension, or deactivation of such account.

Social media platform providers shall comply with the Disabling Order within five (5) days from receipt thereof, unless a shorter period is required by the Department of Information and Communications Technology due to urgent circumstances involving child safety, public interest, or risk of serious harm.

In case of failure or refusal to comply with a Disabling Order, the Department of Information and Communications Technology shall notify the National Telecommunications Commission, which shall direct internet service providers to implement appropriate technical measures, including domain, URL, or IP blocking, solely for purposes of enforcing the Disabling Order.

The National Telecommunications Commission shall monitor compliance by internet service providers and submit periodic reports to the Department of Information and Communications Technology.

SECTION 9. Due Process in Enforcement. — Except in urgent cases involving child safety, risk of serious harm, or continuing violation, the Department of Information and Communications Technology shall give the concerned social media platform provider or third-party age verification provider notice and a reasonable opportunity to explain or comply before imposing administrative penalties.

The procedure for investigation, issuance of compliance orders, issuance of disabling orders, and imposition of penalties shall be provided in the implementing rules and regulations.

SECTION 10. Data Privacy. — All personal information collected, processed, stored, or used pursuant to this Act shall strictly comply with Republic Act No. 10173, or the "Data Privacy Act of 2012," its implementing rules and regulations, and issuances of the National Privacy Commission.

Personal information collected under this Act shall be limited to what is necessary for age or identity verification, secured through reasonable and

appropriate safeguards, retained only for the period necessary for lawful purposes, and disposed of securely thereafter.

No personal information collected pursuant to this Act shall be used for targeted advertising, profiling, marketing, sale, or any purpose unrelated to compliance with this Act.

SECTION 11. Penalties. — Any social media platform provider or third-party age verification provider that fails or refuses to comply with this Act, its implementing rules and regulations, or any lawful order issued pursuant thereto shall be subject to the following administrative penalties:

(a) A fine of not less than One Million Pesos (Php1,000,000.00) but not more than Ten Million Pesos (Php10,000,000.00) for each violation;

(b) A daily fine of One Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php100,000.00) for each day of continuing violation after due notice; and

(c) Suspension or revocation of authority to operate within the Philippines, or such other appropriate administrative sanction, for repeated, deliberate, or willful non-compliance.

The foregoing penalties shall be without prejudice to prosecution or liability under existing administrative, civil, or criminal laws.

SECTION 12. Implementing Rules and Regulations. — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Information and Communications Technology, in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Education, National Telecommunications Commission, National Privacy Commission, Council for the Welfare of Children, other relevant government agencies, and appropriate private stakeholders, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

SECTION 13. Separability Clause. — If any provision or part of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions or parts not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 14. Repealing Clause. — All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees, administrative orders, rules and regulations, issuances, or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

SECTION 15. Effectivity. — This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.