

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 9971



Introduced by Deputy Speaker Maria Rachel J. Arenas

AN ACT

PROTECTING FILIPINO CHILDREN BELOW THIRTEEN (13) YEARS OF AGE FROM THE RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY PROHIBITING THEIR INDEPENDENT ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, ESTABLISHING A TIERED SAFETY-BY-DESIGN FRAMEWORK FOR ADOLESCENTS, IMPOSING OBLIGATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OPERATORS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Explanatory Note

Filipino children are growing up online earlier than any generation before them. Many open their first social media account well before they turn thirteen, often unsupervised, and are exposed daily to cyberbullying, online predators, harmful content, and addictive app features designed to keep them scrolling. Recent incidents of violence and abuse involving children, and the rising number of young Filipinos showing signs of anxiety, depression, and sleep problems linked to heavy social media use, show that this is no longer a private family concern but a public health and child-protection emergency.

This bill responds directly to that emergency. It prohibits children below thirteen (13) years old from holding their own social media accounts — the same age limit used by the United States and recognized across the European Union as the point at which a child is still too young to safely navigate adult-designed digital spaces alone. For adolescents aged thirteen (13) to seventeen (17), who remain allowed access, the bill requires platforms to apply strict default privacy and safety settings, limit contact from strangers, and turn off addictive features such as infinite scrolling and late-night notifications, with protections that ease gradually rather than disappear the moment a teenager turns sixteen.

The responsibility to enforce this Act falls on social media platforms, not on children or parents. Platforms must adopt reasonable, privacy-respecting ways to check a user's age, promptly remove accounts of children who slip through, and stop designing features that make it easy for a child to lie about their age. No government ID or facial scan may be forced on every user as the

only way to comply, protecting the privacy of all Filipinos online. Foreign platforms operating here must designate a local representative, so government orders and parents' complaints can no longer be ignored for lack of an address to send them to.

This bill does not criminalize children. A child who lies about his or her age, or a parent who struggles to enforce the rule at home, will not go to jail — they will instead be referred to counseling and digital-parenting support through the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The full weight of the law, including fines of up to fifty million pesos for repeat and willful violations, falls on platforms that refuse to protect Filipino children. The measure also requires the Department of Education to integrate digital literacy into the school curriculum and directs a nationwide public information campaign, recognizing that a ban alone is not enough.

Our children deserve a childhood that is not shaped by algorithms built to capture their attention at the expense of their mental health and safety. This bill gives the State the tools to make that promise real — while keeping the burden where it belongs: on the platforms profiting from our children's attention, not on the children themselves.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this measure is hereby sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria Rachel J. Arenas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARIA RACHEL J. ARENAS
Third District of Pangasinan

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FROM THE RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY PROHIBITING THEIR INDEPENDENT
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SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OPERATORS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

Sec. 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Children’s Online Protection and Social Media Safety Act.”

Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to protect the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of Filipino children in the digital environment, consistent with Article XV, Section 3(2) of the Constitution. The State recognizes that children below thirteen (13) years of age generally lack the capacity to safely navigate algorithm-driven social media platforms, while adolescents progressively gain this capacity and require a graduated, rather than absolute, level of protection. The primary duty to ensure a safe digital environment is placed on social media

platform operators, not on children or their parents, consistent with the least restrictive means of advancing this compelling State interest.

Sec. 3. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of this Act:

(a) Child - refers to a person below eighteen (18) years of age; a Child Below Thirteen refers to one who has not yet reached his or her thirteenth (13th) birthday; and an Adolescent refers to a child who is thirteen (13) to seventeen (17) years of age.

(b) Social Media Platform - refers to any online service that allows users to create accounts, generate or share content, and interact socially with other users, including through algorithm-driven feeds. It excludes platforms used solely for formal education, banking, government transactions, private messaging, or video gameplay without open social networking.

(c) Operator - refers to any person or entity that owns, manages, or controls a Social Media Platform accessible to users in the Philippines.

(d) Age Assurance Measures - refer to reasonable, proportionate, and privacy-preserving methods used to estimate or verify a user's age. These shall not be limited to, nor require as the sole method, government-issued identification or biometric capture.

(e) Lead Agency - refers to the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

Sec. 4. Minimum Age for Independent Social Media Accounts. – No Operator shall permit a child below thirteen (13) years of age, whether physically present in the Philippines or a Filipino citizen for whom the platform has substantial Philippine usage, to create or maintain a personal social media account. This prohibition does not extend to educational or institutional accounts administered by schools, or to a child's use of a shared family device without a personal account, both as the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) shall provide.

Sec. 5. Duty to Prevent Underage Access. – Every Operator shall adopt reasonable, proportionate, and privacy-respecting Age Assurance Measures to prevent and detect underage accounts, and shall promptly suspend or remove an account upon reasonable indication — whether

from user-provided information, complaints, or platform monitoring — that it belongs to a child below thirteen (13) years of age. Every Operator shall maintain an accessible mechanism for parents, guardians, schools, and users to report suspected underage accounts and to contest a restriction made in error.

Sec. 6. Tiered Safeguards for Adolescents. – Adolescents may hold personal social media accounts subject to default privacy and safety settings, including restriction of unsolicited contact from adults or strangers, disabling of algorithmic profiling and addictive design features such as infinite scrolling and late-night notifications, and disabling of livestreaming absent parental consent. Such default protections shall remain in force for adolescents aged sixteen (16) to seventeen (17) years unless knowingly and voluntarily relaxed, to avoid an abrupt loss of protection upon reaching sixteen (16) years of age.

Sec. 7. Prohibition on Circumvention. – No Operator shall design or maintain any feature, setting, or default configuration intended or reasonably likely to circumvent the minimum age requirement under this Act, including permitting repeated age-verification attempts to obtain a false result, or disregarding credible indicators that an existing account belongs to a child below thirteen (13) years of age.

Sec. 8. Age Assurance Standards. – Age Assurance Measures shall be risk-based, shall minimize the collection and retention of personal data, and shall not require government-issued identification or biometric capture as the sole method available to users. Where facial age-estimation technology is used, the Operator shall limit repeated attempts and ensure the technology has undergone third-party accuracy certification under standards the Lead Agency shall issue. All personal data collected for this purpose shall be subject to Republic Act No. 10173 and deleted once no longer necessary.

Sec. 9. Local Representative. – An Operator without a physical office in the Philippines shall designate a local representative authorized to receive legal notices and coordinate with Philippine authorities for purposes of this Act. Service upon the local representative shall be deemed valid service upon the Operator.

Sec. 10. *Non-Liability of Children and Parents.* – No child shall be held criminally, civilly, or administratively liable for violating the minimum age requirement under this Act. No criminal or civil liability shall attach to a parent or guardian by reason of such violation by a child under his or her care, except that a parent or guardian who knowingly and repeatedly facilitates circumvention of this Act may be required to attend a digital-parenting program administered by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Sec. 11. *Lead and Partner Agencies.* – The DICT shall lead the implementation of this Act, in coordination with the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) on digital literacy and school compliance; the DSWD on psychosocial support and parenting programs; the National Privacy Commission on data protection; and the Philippine National Police, the Department of Justice, and other agencies as the IRR may provide.

Sec. 12. *Public Information Campaign.* – The DICT, with DepEd, CHED, and DSWD, shall conduct a nationwide public information campaign on the risks of early social media use, the provisions of this Act, and available parental support, through schools, barangays, and traditional and digital media.

Sec. 13. *Administrative Sanctions.* – An Operator that violates this Act shall, after due notice and hearing, be liable for a graduated administrative fine of not less than One Million Pesos (P1,000,000.00) but not more than Fifty Million Pesos (P50,000,000.00) per violation, with due regard to the gravity, recurrence, and the Operator's economic capacity. In cases of willful and repeated non-compliance, the Lead Agency may, only upon a lawful court order, recommend the temporary restriction of the Operator's specific services in the Philippines. Decisions of the Lead Agency shall be appealable to the Court of Appeals under Rule 43 of the Rules of Court.

Sec. 14. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the DICT. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Sec. 15. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DICT, in consultation with its partner agencies and relevant stakeholders, shall promulgate the rules and regulations necessary for its effective implementation.

Sec. 16. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in force and effect.

Sec. 17. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, orders, rules, and regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

Sec. 18. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,