



Committee: Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime & Counterterrorism
Event: [Examining the Harm of AI Chatbots](#)
Date: September 16, 2025
Time: 2:30 PM
Place: 226 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Member Toplines:

[Chair Josh Hawley \(R-MO\)](#): Hawley criticized big tech companies, asserting that their sole motivation is profit. He referenced [Meta whistleblowers](#) who alleged that the company concealed and suppressed research that indicated its platform was harmful to children. Hawley also highlighted recent incidents of harm and abuse involving artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots, stating that AI is not a friend, therapist, or pastor; rather, it exists solely to generate profit for companies, often at the expense of others.

[Ranking Member Dick Durbin \(D-IL\)](#): Senator Durbin emphasized that addressing online safety issues and the potential risks posed by AI to children is a bipartisan concern. He previewed new legislation he intends to introduce soon, named the *AI LEAD Act*. This legislation would create a federal cause of action for holding AI companies accountable for the harms caused by their systems.

Witness Toplines:

[Jane Doe, Mother](#): Doe recounted the story of how her son's mental health and behavior significantly declined following months-long exposure to Character.AI's chatbot, which had exposed him to sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, and manipulation. Doe called for comprehensive child online safety legislation, safety testing, and third-party certification for AI products.

[Megan Garcia, Mother](#): Garcia shared that last year her oldest son died by suicide at the age of 14 after experiencing prolonged abuse from AI chatbots on Character.AI. Following his death, she filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Character Technology, its founders, and Google, citing mounting evidence that the Character.AI chatbots exploited, sexually groomed, and encouraged suicide in her son. Garcia also highlighted the chatbot's unauthorized practice of psychotherapy and the absence of protective measures and parental controls on the platform. She urged Congress to take action and hold AI companies accountable.

[Matthew Raine, Father](#): Raine detailed the last few months of his son's life, in which he was coached to commit suicide by ChatGPT. He stated that the use of ChatGPT initially began as a homework helper and gradually turned into a "confidant and then suicide coach." Raine called on OpenAI and its founder, Sam Altman, to ensure that ChatGPT is safe, and encouraged the company to pull GPT 4.0 from the market.

[Robbie Torney, Senior Director, AI Programs, Common Sense Media](#): Torney noted that national polling has revealed that three in four teens are already using AI companions, and that only 37 percent of parents are aware that their children are using AI. He highlighted Common Sense Media's study with Sanford Medicine AI chatbots, which found that chatbots are increasingly encouraging eating disorders and suicide. Torney presented Common Sense Media's recommendations to Congress. These recommendations include the following: (1) Implement age verification measures and restrict access to AI companions for users under 18; (2) establish liability frameworks to hold platforms accountable when their AI systems cause harm to children; (3) mandate safety testing and require transparent reporting of AI failures; (4) protect the rights of states to develop their own AI policies.

[Mitch Prinstein, Chief of Psychology, Strategy, and Integration, The American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#): Prinstein described AI chatbots as "data mining traps that exploit the biological vulnerabilities of young people." He explained that the potential dangers of AI are heightened by its often invisible nature and human-like design, and, unlike social media, many parents and teachers do not fully understand what chatbots are or how children engage with them. Prinstein highlighted that APA recently issued a [health advisory](#) regarding AI and youth development, identifying several areas where immediate regulation is needed.

Major Takeaways:

- Durbin called for consequences for the founders of Character.AI, stating that "if you put a price on misconduct, it will change."
- Sen. **Richard Blumenthal** (D-CT) discussed his bipartisan legislation, the *Kids Online Safety Act* (KOSA) ([S. 1748](#)), and emphasized the importance of the duty of care.
- Sen. **Marsha Blackburn** (R-TN) also highlighted KOSA and criticized social media and big tech companies, arguing that they are resisting federal regulatory efforts.
- Hawley called on the CEOs of big tech companies to testify before Congress to discuss the safety of their AI and social media services.
- Sen. **Peter Welch** (D-VT) thanked Blackburn, Blumenthal, and Hawley for their efforts to revise Section 230.
- Sen. **Amy Klobuchar** (D-MN) stated her support for repealing Section 230.