



Results from Count on Mothers' Studies of the

"Protecting Kids on Social Media Act"

and

"Kids Online Safety Act"

Count on Mothers **provides legislators with comprehensive first-hand data to help them make more informed decisions.** Each policy that we examine is selected based on what surveyed Mothers have indicated they want to address, reflecting the priorities of Mothers from across the country and political spectrum. Every Mother is welcome to contribute to our efforts. We do this work because we believe that Mothers' first-hand experiences and knowledge are critical sources of information that need to be an essential part of the federal policy-making process, particularly on bills that affect kids and families.

This report focuses on information Count on Mothers collected on two related bills. In June 2023, we studied Mothers' views on the "Protecting Kids on Social Media Act" (PKSMA). A total of 318 Mothers from 44 states and across the political spectrum provided feedback on this initial version of PKSMA. In November 2023, an updated version of PKSMA was released. To learn about Mothers' perspectives on this revised legislation, we conducted a 1-hour focus group in November 2023 which consisted of 7 Mothers from conservative, moderate, and liberal backgrounds, exploring their experiences related to children, families, and social media. In addition to addressing the updated PKSMA, the focus group also assessed Mothers' opinions of the "Kids Online Safety Act" (KOSA). A survey regarding KOSA was also distributed to Mothers in October 2023 and November. For this survey, 263 Mothers from 43 states and a range of political perspectives shared their views on KOSA by completing our questionnaire.

After analyzing Mothers' opinions from the surveys and focus group, we take this aggregate data and share it with Congressional legislators so they are educated on Mothers' views on the "Protecting Kids on Social Media Act" and the "Kids Online Safety Act."

Methodology

Design

This process uses a mixed methods design. Cross-sectional surveys were distributed and a focus group was conducted among interested Mothers.

Instruments

Surveys and focus group questions are constructed based on main tenets of PKSMA and KOSA. We also assessed Mothers' political ideology and state/ zip code of residence to better understand the background of the sample.

Sampling Procedure

Count on Mothers employs both purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Concerted efforts were made to advertise and distribute the survey and invite participation in the focus group to as many Mothers as possible. For instance, we created Google advertisements, Instagram-based announcements, and posts in Mothers' Instagram groups which consist of participants from across the political spectrum. Additionally, Mothers who receive and/ or complete the questionnaire are encouraged to distribute the survey to Mothers they believe would be interested in sharing their perspectives.

Sample

318 Mothers from 44 states completed the survey focused on PKSMA. 263 Mothers from 43 states filled out the survey addressing KOSA. 7 Mothers participated in the focus group which explored both the updated PKSMA and KOSA bills. Survey and focus group respondents reflect a range of political ideologies from very conservative to very liberal.

Key Findings

Regarding the updated PKSMA and KOSA bills, Mothers who participated in the focus group believe:

- Social media is having harmful effects on the safety and wellbeing of children.
- The government, rather than Mothers, should hold social media companies responsible for protecting the online safety of children.
- Both of these Acts are very promising, and additional steps should be taken to ensure that they are more enforceable.

Throughout the focus group, Mothers expressed their concerns about the addictive nature of social media and how this affects the wellbeing of their children. One mother stated:

"And I, I'm worried about, you know, what this is, these companies are just getting better and better and better at making their content more and more addictive. Like every day, you know, and with AI, it's even contributing. And so I, you know, I do worry about what

is this doing to everybody's brain, especially kids' brains, and that I feel like we need to have somebody involved that's not all about profiting and making money like these companies are."

Regarding the June survey on the "Protecting Kids on Social Media Act," 96% of Mothers surveyed believe this bill should become law, including 100% of very conservative Mothers, 91% of conservative Mothers, 97% of moderate Mothers, 97% of liberal Mothers, and 95% of very liberal Mothers. Additionally:

- 93% of Mothers believe there should be a minimum age of 13 for children to use social media apps.
- 91% of Mothers believe there should be a required parental consent for children 13 through 17 years old to use social media apps.
- 87% of Mothers surveyed believe social media companies should not be allowed to create an algorithm using children's personal data to send them marketing content based upon this information.

One Mother discussed her concerns about the algorithms which have been developed and the addictive potential of social media among children:

"Because if you used social media before they had the algorithms, it was a much more pleasant experience with people that you knew had chosen to interact with. And it's not that I haven't found good things, and obviously it's beyond the scope of just people that you know, but not being able to addict kids in that way, I think, is a good thing."

Similarly, regarding the "Kids Online Safety Act," Mothers across the political spectrum overwhelmingly believe that if passed it would have a positive impact on the safety, health, and wellbeing of kids and families:

- Moderate Mothers most strongly endorsed the positive impact of this bill, followed by liberal and then conservative Mothers. Specifically,
- 71% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement.
- Among moderate Mothers, 91% were in favor of this issue.
- 89% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item.

During the focus group, a Mother expressed her hopes that KOSA will become

law to help protect the wellbeing of her family:

“And I think that this bill is really a huge, huge thing because a lot of us are, some of us have different capabilities in terms of like, how much are we on it? What do we really know about it? And I feel like this has kind of been the generation of like, some of us know, some of us don't. And we're having to kind of wade through these waters of how is this affecting my child and what controls do I need to put in place? And so I feel like, you know, having the government involved at least because there's nobody's monitoring these companies now.”

Bill Component Questions

“Protecting Kids on Social Media Act” (updated)

93% of Mothers believe there should be a minimum age of 13 for children to use social media apps, an element that is included in the initial and revised versions of the bill.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	253	80%
Agree	41	13%
Uncertain	14	4%
Disagree	10	3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
	318	100%*

*On all tables, figures add up to 100%, not accounting for rounding error.

- 100% of very conservative and 95% of conservative Mothers were in agreement.
- Among moderate Mothers, 95% were in favor of this issue.

- 86% of liberal and 91% of very liberal Mothers agreed with this item.

As focus group participants discussed their views on this component of the updated Act, a conservative Mother commented:

“Myself, I'm pretty hardline about, my kid has an iPad that she sees probably two hours a week and there's no Safari on it, so she's almost 13. But I think a lot of the things that we've already started talking about are the reason that I'm too scared to let her have freedom on a device, whether it's social media or just broad access to the internet.”

87% of Mothers believe social media companies should not be allowed to create an algorithm using children's personal data to send the children marketing content based on this personal data, an element that is included in the initial and revised versions of the bill.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	245	77%
Agree	33	10%
Unsure	20	6%
Disagree	4	1%
Strongly Disagree	16	5%
	318	100%

- 94% of very conservative and 95% of conservative Mothers were in agreement.
- Among moderate Mothers, 85% were in favor of this issue.
- 88% of liberal and 83% of very liberal Mothers agreed with this item.

Most Mothers participating in the focus group expressed their concerns about algorithms and marketing targeting children. A conservative Mother said:

“So, I'm supportive. I mean, I wish they'd get rid of the algorithm altogether, for everybody. Because if you used social media before they had the algorithms, it was a much more pleasant experience with people that you knew had chosen to interact with. And it's not that I haven't found good things, and obviously it's beyond the scope of just people that you know, but not being able to addict kids in that way, I think, is a good thing.”

A provision of the revised PKSMA – that “social media companies” focus on platforms that derive revenue from advertising or the sale of personal data – was discussed during the focus group.

Regarding this topic, a liberal Mother stated:

“I think it's necessary. I have no idea how it would be enforced or how they would go about rolling it out, but I think it's, because it is, I mean, it's totally addicting in a way that's almost creepy. Like, it's like you think about something and all of a sudden there's an ad and you're like, how did that happen? And that's happened to me more than once. And it's freaking weird and I just do not want my little, I wouldn't want anyone's little child's brain to have to be exposed to that.”

Another provision of the updated PKSMA was discussed during the focus group – providing the FTC and state attorneys general authority to enforce the provisions of the bill.

A moderate Mother expressed her views on this issue:

So I don't know how, that seems like it would be really hard to enforce. I like the idea that there would be, you know, the FTC could enforce more things on these companies.”

83% of Mothers who completed the survey on the initial version of this bill believe the "Protecting Kids on Social Media Act" will have a positive impact on the health and safety of their families.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	198	62%
Agree	67	21%
Unsure	48	15%
Disagree	5	2%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
	318	100%

- 80% of very conservative and 86% of conservative Mothers were in agreement.
- Among moderate Mothers, 84% were in favor of this issue.
- 84% of liberal and 80% of very liberal Mothers agreed with this item.

A moderate Mother discussed the potential benefits of the revised bill:

“And it's hard to put in, for me, it has been difficult to put in restrictions that my kid couldn't easily go around. Like they're just, anyway, so that's my experience with that and I also do understand the good, but I feel like the bad outweighs the good and I really do feel like we need help. And I'm not a person who wants overly interference, but like I don't want my kids being able to buy a gun either, you know, and like what they can get online is just like the access they have just feels so overwhelming. So, I think the bill is great.”

96% of Mothers believe the "Protecting Kids on Social Media Act" should become law.

Belief	# of Moms Responding	Percent of Sample
Yes	293	96%
No	11	4%
	304	100%

- 100% of very conservative and 91% of conservative Mothers were in agreement.
- Among moderate Mothers, 97% were in favor of this issue.
- 97% of liberal and 95% of very liberal Mothers agreed with this item.

A liberal Mother stated that she supports both the updated PKSMA and KOSA bills:

“We have to deal with the impact of the content that our kids inevitably already have access to with or without our permission, with or without our oversight. And so we need the social media companies to be held accountable. And that's what I really liked about these proposed bills is that everything was on social media companies too. They should be responsible.”

Bill Component Questions

“Kids Online Safety Act”

98% of Mothers believe the federal government should require that social media companies provide minors with ways to protect their information, remove addictive product components, and opt out of product components that cause addiction.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	233	89%
Agree	24	9%
Uncertain	5	2%
Disagree	1	>1%
Strongly Disagree	0	0
	263	100%*

*On all tables, figures add up to 100%, not accounting for rounding error.

Mothers across the political spectrum were nearly unanimous in their support of this item. In fact, not a single very conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal mother disagreed.

- 90% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement, and 3% opposed this item.
- Among moderate Mothers, 97% were in favor of this issue, 3% were unsure, and no one opposed.
- 100% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item.

Throughout the focus group, Mothers expressed their concerns about the addictive nature of social media and how this affects the wellbeing of their children. Supporting this aspect of the bill, a moderate Mother stated:

“And I, I'm worried about, you know, what this is, these companies are just getting better and better and better at making their content more and more addictive. Like every day, you know, and with AI, it's even contributing. And so I, you know, I do worry about what is this doing to everybody's brain, especially kids' brains, and that I feel like we need to have somebody involved that's not all about profiting and making money like these companies are.”

97% of Mothers believe that parents should have new methods to identify harmful practices toward children and report these harms to the social media companies.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	228	87%
Agree	27	10%
Uncertain	5	2%
Disagree	1	>1%
Strongly Disagree	2	1
	263	100%

On the above item, Mothers from across the political spectrum very strongly agreed with this issue.

- 94% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement, and 3% opposed this item.

- Among moderate Mothers, 98% were in favor of this issue, 3% were unsure, and no one opposed.
- 97% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item, and 2% were in disagreement.

Mothers who participated in the focus group shared similar perspectives. A liberal Mother commented:

“If they're bullied, if a friend is bullied, because I like, we need, you know, yes, parents should have new methods to identify harmful practices towards children. The children should have those methods as well to identify.”

97% of Mothers believe that the federal government should mandate social media companies prevent and reduce harm to minors (e.g., suicide prevention, sexual exploitation).

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	229	87%
Agree	26	10%
Uncertain	5	2%
Disagree	3	1%
Strongly Disagree	0	0
	263	100%

While most Mothers were in agreement, there were some differences between conservative Mothers.

- 84% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement, and 13% were unsure, and 3% opposed this item.
- Among moderate Mothers, 99% were in favor of this issue, and 1% were opposed.
- 99% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item, and only 1% disagreed.

During the focus group, Mothers expressed concerns about the harms of social media. Most Mothers seemed to support the aspect of the bill which grants the government responsibilities for mandating that social media companies protect their children. A Mother who identified as liberal stated:

"I've heard about a lot of negative things. I've heard about, you know, young children committing suicide due to being bullied or, you know, being treated terribly online. And that is a really serious, obviously, problem. So that obviously concerns me. And I think that this bill is really a huge, huge thing because a lot of us are, some of us have different capabilities in terms of like, how much are we on it? What do we really know about it? And I feel like this has kind of been the generation of like, some of us know, some of us don't. And we're having to kind of wade through these waters of how is this affecting my child and what controls do I need to put in place? And so I feel like, you know, having the government involved at least because there's nobody's monitoring these companies now."

96% of Mothers believe that social media companies should be required to submit to a yearly independent audit that evaluates the companies' risk to minors, compliance with the law, and harm prevention efforts.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	218	83%
Agree	35	13%
Uncertain	6	2%
Disagree	3	1%
Strongly Disagree	1	>1%
	263	100%

Moderate and liberal Mothers very strongly endorsed this item, and a majority conservative Mothers did as well.

- 87% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement, 3% were unsure, and 10% opposed this item.
- Among moderate Mothers, 98% were in favor of this issue, 2% were unsure, and no one opposed.
- 97% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item, 2% were unsure, and only 1% disagreed.

A liberal Mother from the focus group stated that social media companies, rather than Mothers, should be primarily responsible for routinely ensuring that online content is safe for children:

“They are the ones making money. They are the ones putting our children at risk. We should not have to just be the bad guy all the time and say, my child's gonna be a social outcast because of my rules and everybody else is doing it. There should be protections that are good for all children just the way we have age limits on other controlled substances and content.”

86% of Mothers believe that the federal government should allow universities and public interest groups access to social media companies' databases to conduct research on harm, safety, and wellbeing to minors.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	170	65%
Agree	55	21%
Uncertain	27	10%
Disagree	7	3%
Strongly Disagree	4	2%
	263	100%

Compared to the other provisions of the Act, there was less support among all Mothers, in particular Mothers who identified as conservative. However, most Mothers from across the political spectrum were in favor of this issue.

- 68% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement, 6% were unsure, and 26% opposed this item.
- Among moderate Mothers, 86% were in favor of this issue, 14% were unsure, and no one opposed.
- 89% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item, 9% were unsure, and only 2% disagreed.

Most mothers who participated in the focus group also thought that research should be conducted on the practices of social media companies. A moderate Mother stated:

"I think it's really important for the, um, there's a lot of research being done on what social media is doing to like the, to brains and the addictive piece of it. And I, you know, I know there are, you know, universities are, are doing a lot of research in this area and Common Sense Media is a really great resource that has a lot of information in this area."

88% of Mothers believe that the "Kids Online Safety Act" will have a positive impact on the safety, health, or well-being of kids and families.

Belief	# of Mothers Responding	Percent of Sample
Strongly Agree	174	66%
Agree	57	22%
Uncertain	30	11%
Disagree	2	1%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
	263	100%

Moderate Mothers most strongly endorsed the positive impact of this bill, followed by liberal and then conservative Mothers.

- 71% of very conservative and conservative Mothers were in agreement, 26% were unsure, and 3% opposed this item.

- Among moderate Mothers, 91% were in favor of this issue, 8% were unsure, and no one opposed.
- 89% of liberal and very liberal Mothers agreed with this item, 10% were unsure, and only 1% disagreed.

A moderate Mother stated that she supports both PKSMA and KOSA:

"I think this Act, I like it, but I feel like it might be really hard to enforce. I mean, because the children under the age of 13, I think Facebook has that. I think companies have had these in their rules, but kids, parents, people are making accounts anyway. So, I don't know how, that seems like it would be really hard to enforce. I like the idea that there would be, you know, the FTC could enforce more things on these companies."

Additional Themes

Analyses of data collected from the focus group with 7 Mothers resulted in the identification of a few additional themes of particular interest.

Social Media is Negatively Impacting Children and Families

While they noted that social media has its benefits, Mothers discussed at length their concerns regarding its negative effects. They described how social media is causing harm to their families, in particular the wellbeing of their children. A Mother who identified as moderate commented:

"My son in particular, he watches YouTube shorts and he seems to lose track of time and just keeps watching and watching until one of us is like, please get off. I've seen that and I've seen some friends' kids getting bullied on social media, getting depressed, feeling left out and isolated. I've also seen positives, you know, people feeling more connected during the pandemic and staying in touch with people."

A conservative Mother shared similar concerns about the ways in which social media impacts children's health, and stated that these stresses are also affecting her wellbeing:

"So bad for their nervous system for their little bodies to constantly be getting that dopamine hit all the time and need it. It just dysregulates them... it completely just dysregulates their bodies and that's not even talking about electromagnetic waves and all of the radiation that they're getting from holding their phone all the time and being in front of screens and Wi Fi all the time."

So, to be constantly connected is doing physiological harm, psychological harm to their entire bodies, to their entire beings. And for me, I mean, I sometimes want to go live on an island somewhere because I just feel like it's so hard to escape it."

Mothers also reported that social media is having deleterious effects on their children's relationships and experiences at school. A conservative Mother described how social media may be causing her daughter harm:

"Like since probably seven or eight years old, she's been more alienated from most of the kids her age because they started having social media and TikTok and you see them in miniskirts in second grade making videos for attention and my daughter's over here like, 'I'm not cool according to them because I don't have TikTok in second grade.' And I'm like, when did this happen?"

Later in the focus group, the same conservative Mother stated:

"I was curious too about public schooling and how they would come into play with this because my daughter when she was probably 10 or 11, she even wrote a letter to the principal about how she can't even make friends because everyone's phone is in their face or their faces are in their phones, right? And I'm like, when are they going to learn to build real relationships if their phones are their faces, even at school. Like there is a rule that says they're not supposed to use it, but how come no one can enforce it? You know what I mean?"

Mothers Need Guidance on how to Respond

Focus group participants expressed their fears about social media and how they should best parent their children as a result of these concerns. Commented a conservative Mother:

"But I think a lot of the things that we've already started talking about are the reason that I'm too scared to let her have freedom on a device, whether it's social media or just products on the internet. But aside from me, there's a bunch of parents in my neighborhood who fear letting our kids just ride on the public school bus because your story is about, I'm eight years old, but look what I learned today on a video. Look what I saw, and then I'm going to go and Google it on any device that I have."

In response to their concerns, Mothers indicated that they need guidance on how to provide supervision and support to their children regarding social media and safety. Several Mothers noted that they do not have the knowledge to be able to do so. A liberal Mother stated:

“But also informing them how to be, how to, what to do when there's bullying online. If they're bullied, if a friend is bullied, because I like, we need, you know, yes, parents should have new methods to identify harmful practices towards children. The children should have those methods as well to identify. I just, you know, my best friend's teenage daughter was just in a situation where a friend helped their mutual friend to ask for help. And adults were not involved in that initial scenario. And then the appropriate adults did get involved, but the kids are the ones that talked to each other and said, ‘Hey, you need to ask for help. You need to talk to somebody about this.’ So how can we involve the kids in protecting themselves?”

Mothers Recommend Additional Measures

While a vast majority of Mothers supported these bills, some found the language too vague or were concerned that its provisions could not be enforced. Mothers also recommended additional modifications which could support children’s safety on social media. A conservative Mother expressed the following:

“I didn't read the actual bill, just looking at the summary. So, I don't know if one of you could summarize those or if they're in more detail in the bill because those first two points about it requiring them to provide minors with ways to protect their information and remove addictive product components and opt out of product components that cause addiction, and then providing parents with new methods, it just seems really vague. Like, and it seems like it's optional... I would love to see like a screen time, you know, field mandated. Like if you let your, if you approve your kid having TikTok or Instagram, like you get to set a time limit of 30 minutes or like there's a federal mandate of if you're under 17, right? Ideally, they can just say like they're the, the app has to mandate it, like a screen time limit for a particular user of, you know, under an hour or two hours a day or whatnot.”

In addition to recommending clearer language in the bills, a conservative Mothers also gave specific examples of technology-related changes that could support children’s online wellbeing:

“So the parent can get in the settings, put in a password, click some buttons and like change how the app interacts with the child then I think something like that if that's what this is talking about from the things it just looks very vague... And if so if they don't have these tools like you know what happens so I think it could be really good because it looks like it gives more power to the parents to, you know, toggle with the app and figure out what's good for their child and what's not which would be great because right now you know... everyone sees the same TikTok or whatever, so to be able to put that back in the hands of the parents just like you know you have those TV controls where you can press the numbers on the TV and your kid only gets to see certain channels.”

Political Ideology Question

Count on Mothers is committed to representing Mothers of all political ideologies so that Congress can be best informed of constituents' experiences and views. In the overall sample of PKSMA survey respondents, 6% were very conservative, 13% were conservative, 30% were moderate, 37% were liberal, and 14% were very liberal.

Regarding the political background of KOSA survey participants, 5% were very conservative, 7% were very conservative, 35% were moderate, 38% were liberal, and 13% were very liberal.

Regarding focus group participants, 29% identified as conservative, 29% identified as moderate, and 43% identified as liberal.

While national data on Mothers' political ideologies has not been identified, studies have examined the political ideologies of women, in general. According to a recent Gallup Poll (2021), 32% of women identified as conservative, 37% of women identified as moderate, and 29% of women identified as liberal. Count on Mothers will continue to invite the participation of Mothers across the political spectrum so that our sample closely mirrors these national trends.

State of Residence Question

Regarding PKSA, participating Mothers resided in 44 states. The states that had the most representation were California (76), New York (27), Florida (15), Virginia (13), and Connecticut (12). Mothers who responded to the KOSA survey resided in 43 states. The states that had the most representation were California (41), New York (19), Connecticut (15), Virginia (15), and Illinois (12). Mothers who participated in the focus group were from the states of California, Illinois, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas.

Future Legislative Focus

According to Mothers who completed the surveys, these additional legislative issues should be the focus of future efforts for Count on Mothers:

- Gun control, gun safety, and gun violence

- Child care issues, such as affordability of child care services and paid leave for Mothers
- Educational issues, such as school funding, school lunches, and curriculum