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Youth Orgs Unite: The Young People's Alliance, #HalfTheStory, and Encode Justice Join Forces to Support KOSA

(February 26, 2024) Today, the Young People's Alliance, #HalfTheStory, and Encode Justice jointly endorse the Kids Online Safety Act. As Gen Z-led organizations, we have watched social media companies prioritize profit over our mental wellbeing for 20+ years and now we are joining together to hold these platforms accountable. For our generation, social media is a core aspect of our social and professional lives. We are calling on Congress to pass KOSA so that our modern public square is a place that is beneficial and empowering for young people rather than a place that manipulates users for profit.

Our initial reluctance to support KOSA stemmed from concerns over the potential misuse of the legislation to censor the speech of marginalized communities. However, we commend the diligent efforts by the bill's authors, youth advocates, parents and non-profit stakeholders who have worked to mitigate these risks through advocacy and revision of the text, notably removing the authority of State Attorneys General to enforce the duty of care. We proudly endorse the updated version and are confident that it will improve wellbeing for all communities across the internet.

"In the digital age, companies are using massive amounts of user data to build online experiences that take advantage of your most subtle preferences and insecurities to keep you online for as long as possible", **Sam Hiner**, Executive Director of the Young People's Alliance. In this era of mass behavioral engineering, prioritizing users' agency and emotional wellbeing should be the foundational principle guiding tech policy, and KOSA represents an important stride toward achieving that. KOSA will be a positive force for young people by allowing them to disable harmful algorithms, take charge of their safety, and hold social media accountable for manipulative tactics. "AI has made social media harms devastatingly personalized and potent, and our generation is suffering the consequences. KOSA will help us change course," added **Sneha Revanur**, founder/president of Encode Justice, a leading youth AI advocacy group.

While we're excited about KOSA's potential to benefit our generation, we believe it's crucial for online safety laws to mandate that manipulative recommendation algorithms are disabled by default. As people who grew up on social media from ages as young as 10-12, we were exposed to algorithms that were designed to addict us to platforms and promoted extreme content to this end, fostering eating disorders, hate-based politics, and self-harm- with no tools to protect our safety. "We should be able to opt into the harms, rather than opt out of the harms of algorithms," **Larissa May**, CEO of #HalfTheStory. Forcing people to make the decision to turn off an addictive feature only after a company has exposed them to addiction gives companies an unfair advantage.

We urge Congress to pass the Kids Online Safety Act and include updated provisions that ensure that algorithmic recommendation systems that utilize user-related data are turned off by default.

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