

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2020

Dr. Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Collins:

We write regarding the need for a major research initiative focused on the impact of technology use and media consumption on children, teens, and infants. Given the rapid increase in young people's use of new technologies and digital media platforms, it is imperative that policymakers, families, and relevant industry entities have access to high quality, empirical research into how these stimuli affect young users.

In 2020, children are using more technology than ever, younger than ever. Recent research shows that American children ages 8 to 12 spend almost five hours a day watching screens, and the percent of young people who report watching videos online on a daily basis has more than doubled since 2015.¹ These figures come as no surprise given that a majority of children have a smartphone by age eleven.² From social media apps to mobile devices to virtual reality products, powerful technologies and platforms are increasingly integral to the lives and routines of children.

In schools and in homes, young people are using technology to entertain themselves, educate themselves, and communicate with one another; however, while kids and teens are increasingly living their lives online and with devices in their hands, parents and policymakers alike lack important information about how increased technology use is impacting children in America. Leading companies, researchers, and expert advocacy organizations agree that there is an urgent need for independent, long-term, and rigorous research into how digital media and technology use affect children physically, cognitively, and socio-emotionally, as evidenced by growing support for legislation pending before Congress.³ As the largest funder of biomedical research in the world, the NIH has an important role to play in catalyzing and conducting critical research into how technology use and digital media consumption relate to and influence social awareness, problem solving skills, exercise, and other important outcomes.

¹ Victoria Rideout, V & Michael B. Robb, *The Common Sense census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens*, Common Sense Media (2019).

² *Id.*

³ Letter from supporter of the Children and Media Research Advancement (CAMRA) Act, to Members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate (Dec. 12, 2019).

Congress recognized the need to invest in this type of research in the explanatory statement accompanying the FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriation Act stating that, "The agreement recognizes that children's and teens' lives increasingly involve widespread technology use and consumption of digital media. The agreement encourages NIH to prioritize research into how these types of stimuli affect young people's cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional outcomes, including attention, sleeping routines, and anxiety."

Therefore, we look forward to working with NIH to foster new research shedding light on the affects, both positive and negative, of children's widespread and increasing technology use. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Roy Blunt
United States Senator


Ben Sasse
United States Senator