

United States Senate

July 15, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

We write to urge you to advance S. 971, the *Children and Media Research Advancement (CAMRA) Act*, through the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP Committee). This critical legislation, which passed the House of Representatives with overwhelming bipartisan support on June 22, 2022, will launch a research initiative at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study how technology use affects the development of children and teens. We commend your leadership on these important issues, and look forward to working with you to bring this bill to the Senate floor.

Technology is increasingly omnipresent in the life of children and teens. One-third of parents report that their child began using a smartphone before the age of five,¹ and over half of children own a smartphone by age 11.² Additionally, children are early acquirers of new consumer electronics, with 17 percent of children ages 8 to 18 already owning a virtual reality headset.³ Young people's increasing digital media consumption and technology use has accelerated in recent years. During the pandemic, the average daily screen time among individuals ages 10 to 14 increased from 3.8 hours to 7.7 hours,⁴ and the number of messages children send and receive online increased 144 percent.⁵

Initial research into kids' and teens' increasing engagement with technology and digital media sources points to concerning findings – including a detrimental impact on mental health⁶ –and

¹ Brooke Auxier et al., *Children's Engagement with Digital Devices, Screen Time*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (July 28, 2020), www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/childrens-engagement-with-digital-devices-screen-time/.

² Anya Kamenetz, *It's a Smartphone Life: More Than Half Of U.S. Children Now Have One*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (Oct. 31, 2019), n.pr/3Oye2FR.

³ Nelson Reed, *What Are Kids Doing in the Metaverse?*, COMMON SENSE MEDIA (Mar. 23, 2022), www.commonsensemedia.org/kids-action/articles/what-are-kids-doing-in-the-metaverse.

⁴ Megan Marples, *Kids Nearly Doubled Screen Time During the Pandemic, But There Is Something You Can Do About It*, CABLE NEWS NETWORK (Nov. 1, 2021), www.cnn.com/2021/11/01/health/children-screen-time-increase-pandemic-study-wellness/index.html.

⁵ Heather Kelly, *Growing Up on Screens: How a Year Lived Online has Changed Our Children*, WASH. POST (Mar. 5, 2021), www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/03/05/screen-time-one-year-kids/.

⁶ See Jonathan Haidt, *The Dangerous Experiment on Teen Girls*, THE ATLANTIC (Nov. 21, 2021), www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/facebooks-dangerous-experiment-teen-girls/620767/.

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makes a strong case for increased investment in this area of scholarship. Relevant studies, for example, show connections between children's media viewing and sleep disturbances,⁷ associations between depression and online social networking among high school students,⁸ and correlations between internet use and issues with emotion regulation.⁹ In an increasingly digital world, experts agree that nuanced, research-driven approaches are necessary.¹⁰

The *CAMRA Act* will catalyze empirical investigation to examine these problems, lay the groundwork for solutions, and enable parents, pediatricians, and educators to make informed decisions and promote kids' and teens' wellbeing. The Act will authorize NIH to lead a research program on the effect of technology and media on infants, children, and adolescents in core areas of cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development. That is why parents, researchers, child advocacy groups, and companies have called on Congress to pass this important legislation.¹¹

We appreciate your ongoing leadership on these issues and urge you to promptly advance the *CAMRA Act* through your Committee.

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

⁷ Holly Scott et al., *Social Media Use and Adolescent Sleep Patterns: Cross-Sectional Findings From the UK Millennium Cohort Study*, BJM OPEN (Oct. 22, 2019), www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6830469/.

⁸ Igor Pantic et al., *Association Between Online Social Networking and Depression in High School Students: Behavioral Physiology Viewpoint*, PSYCHIATRIA DANUBINA (Mar. 2012), pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22447092/.

⁹ Francesca Gioia et al., *Problematic Internet Use and Emotional Dysregulation Among Young People: A Literature Review*, Clinical Neuropsychiatry (Feb. 2021), ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8629046/.

¹⁰ See e.g., Shira Ovide, *The Messy Truth About Kids' Screen Time*, N.Y. TIMES (July 26, 2021), nytimes.com/2021/07/26/technology/kids-screen-time.html.

¹¹ See Letter from Common Sense Media et al., to Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, Chair Murray, and Ranking Member Burr (Jan. 20, 2022); Letter from Dr. Dimitri Christakis et al., to Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, Chair Murray, and Ranking Member Burr (Apr. 5, 2022).