

After legal loss, Ohio lawmakers target app stores with teen social media law

By Anna Staver
Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- After [a federal court](#) struck down their first attempt to limit teen social media use, Ohio lawmakers have a new approach: go through the app stores.

Instead of putting the responsibility for policing whether children are using their apps on platforms like Instagram or TikTok, Republicans want Apple and Google to check before certain apps are downloaded.

Under [House Bill 226](#), app stores would ask users how old they are. Users would verify their age and those younger than 16 would need parental permission to download apps on their phones.

"I really think this is a great solution to try and address this situation," said Republican Rep. Melanie Miller, of Ashland.

App stores couldn't use data they collected to give an unfair advantage to themselves or other applications. And they'd have to offer ways for parents to connect with Instagram or TikTok to set up parental controls.

"I know even when I was a teenager, there were challenges and bullying on media platforms," Miller said.

She grew up in the age of AOL's instant messenger and girls would send bullying messages after school.

"It was really devastating, some of the things I experienced," she said.

She thinks parents need to know what apps their children use and what content they're seeing.

At a recent visit to an Ashland school, Miller said a “disturbing” number of middle school students raised their hands to say they had apps on their cellphones that their parents didn’t know about.

“One young girl confessed at the end of this session that she’d been in a situation online where law enforcement got involved,” Miller said.

The move to shift responsibility from social media companies to app stores marks a new strategy for Ohio lawmakers.

On Wednesday, a federal judge blocked Ohio’s law requiring companies that create apps children access (social media, gaming) get parental consent for minors younger than 16.

The tech group NetChoice sued, saying it violated free speech. U.S. District Court Judge Algenon Marbley agreed and stopped the law from taking effect.

“This ruling really lends to a strong argument as to why the app store level is the right approach,” Miller said. “I really believe we’re on the right track.”

Miller’s bill is nearly identical to one introduced by Central Ohio Republican state Sen. Michele Reynolds. And they’re part of a growing national debate over who should control what kids see online.

At least eight other states have [introduced bills](#) to put the onus on app stores, including Utah which [signed its version](#) into law in March.

Meta and other social media companies support putting the onus on app stores.

“Parents want a one-stop shop to verify their child’s age and grant permission for them to download apps in a privacy-preserving way. The app store is the best place for it,” Meta, X and Snap Inc. said in a joint statement. “We applaud Utah for putting parents in charge with its landmark legislation and urge Congress to follow suit.”

Google, however, isn’t happy.

“There are a variety of fast-moving legislative proposals being pushed by Meta and other companies in an effort to offload their own responsibilities to keep kids safe to app stores,” wrote Google’s director of public policy Kareem Ghanem in a [blog post](#) urging Utah’s governor to veto that bill.

Google, he continued, wants “a more comprehensive legislative framework that shares responsibility between app stores and developers.”

Republican state Sen. Tom Patton from Strongsville introduced [Senate Bill 175](#) in April, which created new responsibilities for both app stores and developers.