

HCS HB 2032 -- AGE VERIFICATION MEASURES FOR COMPANION CHATBOTS

SPONSOR: Schmidt

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Emerging Issues by a vote of 9 to 3.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2032.

This bill establishes the "Guidelines for User Age-Verification and Responsible Dialogue Act of 2026" or the "GUARD Act".

The bill provides definitions for, among other terms, "Companion chatbot" and "covered entity".

The bill makes it unlawful to design, develop, or make available a companion chatbot knowing or with reckless disregard for the fact that the companion chatbot poses a risk of soliciting, encouraging, or inducing minors to engage in, describe, or simulate sexually explicit conduct, or create or transmit a visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct. A violation of this provision is a fine of no more than \$100,000 per offense.

The bill additionally makes it unlawful to design, develop, or make available a companion chatbot knowing or with reckless disregard for the fact that the companion chatbot encourages, promotes, or coerces suicide, self-injury, or imminent physical or sexual violence. A violation of this provision is a fine of no more than \$100,000 per offense.

The bill requires a covered entity to require each individual accessing a companion chatbot to make a user account. For each account that exists as of August 28, 2026, the covered entity is required to freeze the account and, in order to restore the account's functionality, require that the user verify his or her age using a commercially available method or process designed to ensure accuracy. Using this information, the covered entity then must classify each user as a minor or an adult. If a user is classified as a minor, a covered entity must prohibit the minor user's use or access any companion chatbot owned, operated, or made available by the covered entity.

When an individual creates a new user to account to use or interact with a companion chatbot, a covered entity is responsible for verifying the age of the user and classifying each such user as a minor or adult. The bill permits covered

entities to contract with a third party to employ reasonable age verification measures.

A covered entity is responsible for maintaining and protecting the confidentiality of the age information provided for verification.

The bill establishes certain conditions that must be met by each companion chatbot made available to users, including certain programming requirements and disclosures to users that the chatbot is artificial intelligence and not a human being.

The Attorney General can initiate a civil action in the case of a violation of the provisions of this bill, and may promulgate all necessary rules for the administration of these provisions.

Any person violating the age verification provisions of this bill will be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$100,000 per violation.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this bill will protect children when they engage in online spaces. Supporters further state that use of existing technology can lead to suicide, self-harm, and explicit suggestions. Such technology is designed to blur the line between human and artificially created bots, but children do not have the wherewithal to understand or deal with such interactions. Supporters also state that the provisions of this bill place the responsibility on the company that creates the companion bots to ensure safety, because currently companies are not pro-actively taking any measures to regulate the features of the companion bots.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Schmidt; Issachar LLC; Missouri Network of Child Advocacy Centers Inc.; Missouri Chapter of The American Academy of Pediatrics; and Missouri Psychological Association.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say the definition of a chatbot should not include video games.

Testifying in person on the bill was the Entertainment Software Association.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.