



What two nationwide conferences are teaching us about online safety

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The conversations around how to protect young people online are no longer new and there has been enough evidence, even if anecdotal, that something must be done. Usually, one of the most difficult hurdles in policymaking is gathering bipartisan support. With kids' online safety however, in nearly every region of the country, the issue is strongly bipartisan. Unlikely allies within legislatures agree that kids are online and the ever-changing digital environment is a challenge for children and parents to navigate. However, even with that consensus, solutions to achieving the goal of a safer internet are polarizing.

Over the course of two weeks, I attended two major conferences that wrestled with online safety policy solutions. The [National Conference of State Legislatures's](#) (NCSL) Legislative Summit, one of the largest convenings of state policymakers in the country, hosted thousands of state policymakers on a variety of topics. Yet whether it was how AI is impacting the workforce, the highly contentious predictive markets and online betting, or kids' social media habits, technology safety and regulation dominated the conversation.

Next, I attended the [National Network to End Domestic Violence's](#) (NNEDV) SetyNet Summit, a multi-day conference dedicated to the intersection of technology and gender-based violence which brought together advocates from the country's 56 states and territories. Over the course of the summit, advocates from all over shared their hopes for and concerns about young people's access to the internet. This included how teens use technology to connect and cope, how technology may be used to perpetuate unhealthy dating relationships, and how AI is serving as a first response for survivors of domestic violence.

These two vastly different convenings shared one powerful theme: youth online safety is a priority to address *now*.

AI regulation is not one-size fits all.

While the policy debate happens in state capitals, the impacts of those decisions are felt by children, families, and advocates every day. NCSL highlighted the variety of chatbot measures that are being considered or have passed in certain states. On a policy panel addressing this issue, one sticking point that became a recurring theme in conversations was the importance of definitions, specifically as they relate to chatbots. In March 2026, Oregon became one of the first states to pass [legislation](#) regulating chatbots. During the panel, Senator Lisa Reynolds was enthusiastic about the measure passing into law and shared that a “broad definition” was needed to address the potential harms of chatbots interacting with children. On the same panel, Senator Page Walley from Tennessee described his state’s very narrow definition in [recent legislation](#), which prohibits chatbots from acting as licensed mental health professionals, as a more palatable approach.

The following week at NNEDV’s SafetyNet Summit, representatives from Aimee Says, an AI chatbot designed to handle administrative tasks when a survivor wants to pursue legal action, and Parasol, the parent company that facilitates the National Domestic Violence Hotline’s (NDVH) AI chatbot, Ruth, shared how they built trauma-informed tools to support survivors of domestic violence. They explained that when deployed properly and with privacy at the forefront, AI chatbots do not have to be harmful, regardless of the age of the user. Sandy Skelany of Parasol shared that while NDVH’s Ruth is personified with a female character and can provide trauma-informed care, it is not providing therapy.

When asked if Aimee Says and NDVH’s Ruth have had any issues as states regulate this space, Anne Wintemute (Aimee Says) shared that the company has yet to be impacted. Skelany, however, also noted that some of the bills that require age assurance could impact survivor privacy and access. If the age assurance mechanism requires the user to issue a government ID or any personally identifiable information, this could create additional risks and barriers for survivors of domestic violence. This is especially complicated because some of these survivors are minors.

Bans may appear to be popular solutions, but not for those closest to teens.

Throughout the NNEDV SafetyNet Summit, direct service providers expressed a variety of concerns over teens' attachment to AI chatbots and how teens are increasingly normalizing sharing login credentials to their social media accounts. Even with these challenges, a core principle of the conference remains true: removing survivors of domestic violence from technology is not an option.

Another panel featured [Wesnet](#), an Australia-based domestic violence nonprofit, who explained the impetus, implementation, and aftermath of the Australia social media ban. Sara Biordi and Annabelle Harrison of Wesnet shared that implementation of the ban has been inconsistent in removing young people from social media platforms. This fits with FOSI's findings in our [recent research](#), that shows less than 2 out of 10 children under 16 lost all of their social media accounts after the ban was implemented and an additional 33% of young people only lost some accounts. Not only has implementation been inconsistent, it is likely pushing teens to less safe spaces that they can still access.

Notably, domestic violence advocates who are working directly with teens are not championing bans. Rather, what most on-the-ground advocates are eager for are resources for their clients. Victim service providers shared that young people who are survivors of teen dating violence and live in rural areas need to maintain access to the information and communities that social media provides. Young people in underrepresented groups such as those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and are isolated geographically rely on these connections and resources.

What we learned and what comes next.

The policy solutions happening at the highest levels must be grounded in research and the real-life experiences of those that are being impacted, particularly young people themselves. When policymakers are promoting solutions to keeping kids safe online it is vital that unintended consequences are considered and that the solutions are not just what would make adults feel better, but what will ultimately be effective. Here is where we should focus:

Prioritize data privacy

- When considering products and services that require users to submit personally identifiable information, legislation should include strict data privacy requirements. Ensuring that data is not stored longer than is necessary, users know what data platforms have access to, and no more data is collected than is needed to perform the functions of the platform are a few ways to ensure users' data is safe.

Media and Digital Literacy

- Media literacy for teens, caregivers, educators, and all individuals interacting with young people should be a priority. Advocates with shoestring budgets are consistently sharing their desire for these resources.

Clear definitions and transparency requirements for AI chatbots

- AI chatbots are not simply companion characters that are reserved for 18+ audiences. Many chatbots serve a practical purpose for young people accessing homework help, ideas for entertainment, or even resources on domestic violence. Definitions matter when regulating this space.
- To alleviate some of the emotional overreliance on chatbots, platforms should require their chatbots to disclose after a reasonable interval that the user is not communicating with a human. Similarly, to protect the most vulnerable users, policies that prohibit chatbots from misrepresenting themselves as a human or a licensed financial, legal, or healthcare professional are practical transparency requirements that can help break the anthropomorphizing of the technology.

More collaboration. Especially with young people

- Collaboration cannot be overstated. The disconnect between the policy conversations happening among a small group and the impacts on lives of young people everywhere is palpable and it's imperative that we close this gap.

From the statehouse to the schoolhouse, the conversation around online safety is reaching its peak and young people bear the brunt of policy decisions. It's essential that legislators, caregivers, and advocates align to create thoughtful regulations that empower young people to access the internet safely.

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