

NEW JERSEY ONLINE SAFETY AGENDA

A Blueprint for Protecting our Children and our Democracy from Big Tech

New technology and media platforms, such as social media and artificial intelligence, have made it easier for us to connect, communicate, learn, and manage our personal and professional lives. However, many of the platforms we use have intentionally designed algorithms and other features to be addictive for both children and adults, keeping us engaged by amplifying content that fuels our anxiety and anger. This has played a major role in our youth mental health crisis and the significant increase in depression and self-harm among young people in recent years. For example, a recent study found that young people who spend more than three hours daily on social media have significantly higher risks of developing mental health problems, while Gallup polling has found that teens with the highest social media usage have the worst self-reported mental health.

These algorithms have also helped to deepen political divides and political extremism, by boosting misinformation and echo chambers in our democracy. Without proper safeguards, AI and other new technologies could exacerbate these issues—posing risks to parents concerned about their children’s well-being, workers striving to maintain good-paying and dignified jobs to support their families, and anyone seeking truth in a world increasingly plagued by deep fakes and misinformation.

With the Trump administration pushing for even less oversight of Big Tech, New Jersey must step up to protect our children, workers, and democracy, and ensure that technology serves people, not the other way around.

We can be leaders in innovation while also prioritizing the responsible and ethical development of new technologies and AI. By promoting fairness, transparency, and accountability, we can prevent bias, safeguard human rights, and ensure that technology advances in a way that benefits society as a whole.

PROTECT CHILDREN ONLINE

As every parent knows, social media can have a devastating impact on our children — from promoting poor sleep habits to increasing loneliness, anxiety, and depression. At its worst, it has become a haven for cyberbullying and for glorifying substance abuse, sexual exploitation, eating disorders, and even suicide.

As governor, I'll hold Big Tech companies accountable for the harm they're inflicting on New Jersey's young people and families.

Together, we can:

- ✓ Enact an Age Appropriate Design Code that would require social media companies to prioritize the health, privacy, and safety of users under 16 and would prevent Big Tech from deploying deceptive design tricks, known as “dark patterns” and “nudges,” that are used in apps, websites, and software to manipulate you into doing things you might not want to do—like signing up for a subscription, sharing personal data, or spending more money. We should also ban ads targeted at children, and restrict the collection of their personal data.
- ✓ Require warning labels to appear on all social media noting that it is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents — an idea embraced by the previous administration’s Surgeon General and a bipartisan coalition of 42 state attorneys general last year.
- ✓ Create a first-of-its-kind Social Media Addiction Observatory within a New Jersey higher education institution – similar to the creation of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center at Rutgers – that can bring together public health experts, public interest technology researchers, parents, and the private sector to share data and expertise, and develop recommendations for promoting safer online experiences.
- ✓ Ban the usage of cell phones and other personal connected devices during class time in our public schools, so children can spend more time focusing on interactions with each other and with their teachers.
- ✓ Direct the Commissioner of Education to engage experts to create a new curriculum focused on teaching students to ethically and responsibly use big tech, including social media and AI in their school work and daily lives. Technology that is created, deployed, and used in a responsible and ethical manner can benefit our students and schools.
- ✓ Develop a public awareness campaign in New Jersey communities and schools to help parents understand best practices for keeping their children safe online, including information on the safest ages for children to become active on social media and how to identify online harassment or bullying.

FIGHT EXTREMISM AND BRING OUR COUNTRY BACK TOGETHER

Growing political extremism, along with the rise of hateful ideologies and bigotry, is no coincidence. Social media platforms, bolstered by AI, are intentionally designed to amplify our biases and fuel outrage. By engaging users in this way, Big Tech maximizes profits through increased engagement, views, and screen time. Unless the design of these systems changes, algorithms will continue to prioritize sensationalism, accelerate the spread of misinformation, and push vulnerable individuals toward violence.

As governor, I'll fight the extremism that is tearing New Jersey families and our democracy apart.

Together, we can:

- ✓ Hold social media platforms liable for algorithms that amplify extremist and terrorist content, and that cause extreme harm to children.
 - ✓ Require companies to be transparent about how they design and apply their algorithms so social media users can better understand why certain content is prioritized.
 - ✓ Reinvest in local journalism to rebuild trust in the news, boost civic participation, and root out corruption, by increasing funding for New Jersey's Civic Information Consortium, creating tax incentives for small businesses to advertise in local newspapers, and requiring social media companies to better compensate news publishers for their content.
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HOLD SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES ACCOUNTABLE FOR SCAMS

New Jersey residents reported losing more than \$250 million to scams last year — money that could have gone toward a new car, a downpayment on a home, or putting food on the table. These scammers, who often reside abroad, exploit our weak data privacy laws to target seniors, veterans, and immigrants with paid ads on social media. In this system, scammers and social media companies make millions while New Jersey families can lose their life savings.

As governor, I'll strengthen privacy protections and hold social media companies accountable for enabling scammers to exploit New Jersey families.

Together, we can:

- ✓ Prosecute social media companies that host scam networks and allow scammers to run paid ads targeting New Jersey families, and increase criminal penalties for scammers who target New Jerseyans.
 - ✓ Require social media companies to screen advertisers on their platforms and ensure that all advertisements are backed by a legitimate business or person. A real identifiable human being should be responsible for all content that is pushed out to users. If a social media platform cannot tell you who is behind an advertisement, then the social media platform should assume all liability for any harm caused by that advertisement.
 - ✓ Empower New Jersey residents to control what information is collected about them, how it is used, and who it is shared with, and give them the ability to delete the troves of their personal data collected by data brokers. Businesses should be required to tell us exactly what they intend to do with our data and give us meaningful choices before we share it. And to ensure compliance, there should be direct legal recourse when sensitive data is put at risk by data brokers and New Jerseyans should be able to request an injunction on the use and sharing of their data.
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ENSURE SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As the 2023 federal Executive Order on Artificial Intelligence states: “Responsible AI use has the potential to help solve urgent challenges while making our world more prosperous, productive, innovative, and secure. At the same time, irresponsible use could exacerbate societal harms such as fraud, discrimination, bias, and disinformation; displace and disempower workers; stifle competition; and pose risks to national security.” Yet the Trump administration has threatened to repeal our existing national safeguards against AI misuse. It thus falls to New Jersey and other states to ensure that we get the benefits of this new technology without the deep fakes, discrimination, and displacement of workers that unregulated AI can bring.

As governor, I’ll fight to ensure that AI serves and empowers people, not just the billionaires who want to profit from it.

Together, we can:

- ✓ Require developers of AI products to offer users detection tools and to label AI-generated content so that when we see something created by AI, we will know that it is artificially generated.
- ✓ Enact legislation to expand the scope of existing child pornography laws, as well as existing privacy laws surrounding non-consensual sharing of images, to include content that is digitally altered or generated by AI systems.
- ✓ Enact legislation to require social media platforms to establish reporting tools for users to report cases of sexually explicit digital identity theft.
- ✓ Enact legislation that mandates clear disclosures on political ads generated or significantly altered by AI, aiming to prevent undisclosed AI use that could mislead voters.
- ✓ Enact a package of legislation ensuring that healthcare decisions, including final decisions regarding medical necessity in health insurance utilization reviews, are conducted with a human-in-the-loop.
- ✓ Support writers, artists, and content creators who are organizing to prevent AI companies from stealing and monetizing their work without consent or compensation.