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# PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
May 10, 2021

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## **Attorney General Frosh Joins Bipartisan Coalition Urging Facebook to Abandon Launch of Instagram Kids *Coalition Sends Letter Expressing Serious Concerns Over Safety and Well-Being of Children***

**BALTIMORE, MD (May 10, 2021)** – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today joined a coalition of 44 attorneys general urging Facebook to abandon its plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under the age of 13, citing serious concerns about the safety and well-being of children and the harm social media poses to young people.

In a [letter](#) to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, the coalition contends that social media can be detrimental to children for myriad reasons and that Facebook has historically failed to protect the welfare of children on its platforms.

“Facebook’s Instagram for children is a dangerous idea,” says Attorney General Frosh. “Facebook should be working to protect children on its social media platforms, and this new app opens another door through which a very vulnerable population can be exploited.”

In their letter, the attorneys general express various concerns over Facebook’s proposal, including research that social media can be harmful to the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of children; rapidly worsening concerns about cyberbullying on Instagram; use of the platform by predators to target children; Facebook’s checkered record in protecting the welfare of children on its platforms; and children’s lack of capacity to navigate the complexities of what they encounter online, including advertising, inappropriate content, and relationships with strangers.

At a Congressional hearing in March, Zuckerberg dismissed the idea that social media is harmful to children, despite strong data and research that has shown a link between young people’s use of social media and an increase in mental distress, self-injurious behavior, and suicidality. Instagram has been frequently flagged for increasing suicidal ideation, depression, and body image concerns in children.

Additionally, the attorneys general argue, young children are not equipped to handle the many challenges that come with having an Instagram account, including that they often lack a

developed understanding of privacy. There is also a risk that predators may exploit children online and cloak their identities using the anonymity of the Internet. One report found an increase of 200 percent in recorded instances in the use of Instagram to target and abuse children over a six-month period in 2018. In 2020 alone, Facebook and Instagram reported 20 million child sexual abuse images.

Cyberbullying is also a major concern, and a 2017 survey found that 42 percent of young Instagram users had experienced cyberbullying on the platform, the highest percentage of any platform measured. As children spend more time online during the COVID-19 pandemic, these issues have likely been exacerbated.

The attorneys general also cast doubt on Facebook's ability to protect children on their proposed Instagram platform and to comply with relevant privacy laws such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). They point out that the company has a record of failing to protect the safety and privacy of children. For instance, Facebook's Messenger Kids app contained a glitch that allowed children to circumvent restrictions and join group chats with strangers.

In signing the letter, Attorney General Frosh is joined by the attorneys general of Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2021/051021.pdf>