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Attorney General Brown and a Bipartisan Coalition of Attorneys General File Lawsuits Against Meta for Harming Youth Mental Health Through Its Social Media Platforms

BALTIMORE, MD (October 24, 2023) – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown, along with 41 other state Attorneys General, filed a series of federal and state lawsuits against Meta, alleging that the company knowingly designed and deployed harmful features on Instagram and its other social media platforms with the intent of addicting children and teens, while falsely assuring the public that these features are safe and suitable for young users. The [federal complaint](#) seeks injunctive and monetary relief to rectify the harms caused by these platforms.

The Attorneys General assert that Meta’s business practices violate the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which requires providers of online content, such as Meta, to abide by specific guidelines relating to the collection and handling of minors’ personal information. These practices have harmed and continue to harm the physical and mental health of children and teens, and have fueled what the U.S. Surgeon General has [deemed](#) a “youth mental health crisis” that has ended lives, devastated families, and damaged the potential of a generation of young people.

“A child’s mental health and emotional development help determine how they will see and cope with the world around them, and an addiction to social media disrupts that critical development,” **said Attorney General Brown**. “We believe that Meta has manipulated their social media platforms to attract and addict young people, without regard for how using applications like Instagram will negatively affect children and deepen the mental health crisis afflicting our nation’s youth.”

The federal complaint, joined by Attorney General Brown and 32 other states and filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, alleges that Meta knew of the harmful impact of its platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, on young people. Instead of taking steps to mitigate this damage, it misled the public about the dangers associated with use of its platform, concealing the extent of the psychological and health harms suffered by young users addicted to its platforms. The complaint further alleges that Meta knew that young users, including those under 13, were active on its platforms, and knowingly collected data from these

users without parental consent. It targeted these young users noting, as reported in a 2021 [Wall Street Journal article](#), that such a user base was “valuable, but untapped.”

While much of the complaint relies on confidential material that is not yet available to the public, publicly available sources, including those previously released by former Meta employees, detail that Meta profited by purposely making its platforms addictive to children and teens. Its platform algorithms push users into going down “rabbit holes” in an effort to maximize their engagement. Features like infinite scroll and near-constant alerts were created with the express goal of hooking young users, manipulating them into continual use of, and reliance upon the platform. As Aza Raskin, the original developer of the infinite scroll concept, [noted to the BBC](#) about the feature’s addictive qualities: “If you don't give your brain time to catch up with your impulses... you just keep scrolling.” The Attorneys General allege that Meta knew that these addictive features harmed young people’s physical and mental health, including undermining their ability to get adequate sleep, but did not disclose the dangers or make any meaningful attempt to mitigate them.

In addition to Maryland, states joining the federal lawsuit are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Florida is filing its own federal lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida.

In parallel state court proceedings, eight Attorneys General have made similar allegations. Filing lawsuits in their own state courts are the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, and Vermont.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/102423.pdf>

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