

By: Representatives Ford (73rd), Nelson,
Byrd

To: Technology; Judiciary B

HOUSE BILL NO. 1126
(As Sent to Governor)

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE "WALKER MONTGOMERY PROTECTING CHILDREN
2 ONLINE ACT" FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROTECTING MINOR CHILDREN FROM
3 ONLINE HARMFUL MATERIAL AND ACCESS TO SUCH MATERIAL; TO REQUIRE
4 DIGITAL SERVICE USERS TO REGISTER THEIR AGE; TO LIMIT THE
5 COLLECTION AND USE OF MINOR USERS' PERSONAL IDENTIFYING
6 INFORMATION; TO REQUIRE DIGITAL SERVICES PROVIDERS TO DEVELOP AND
7 IMPLEMENT A STRATEGY TO PREVENT OR MITIGATE CERTAIN HARMS TO
8 MINORS; TO AMEND SECTION 75-24-5, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO
9 PROVIDE THAT A VIOLATION OF THIS ACT IS AN UNFAIR AND DECEPTIVE
10 TRADE PRACTICE THAT IS ENFORCEABLE BY THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY
11 GENERAL; TO AMEND SECTION 97-5-31, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO
12 INCLUDE MORPHED IMAGES OF DEPICTING MINOR CHILDREN IN EXPLICIT
13 NATURE IN THE CRIME OF CHILD EXPLOITATION; AND FOR RELATED
14 PURPOSES.

15 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

16 **SECTION 1.** This act shall be known and may be cited as the
17 "Walker Montgomery Protecting Children Online Act."

18 **SECTION 2.** For purposes of this act, the following words
19 shall have the meanings ascribed herein unless the context clearly
20 requires otherwise:

21 (a) "Digital service" means a website, an application,
22 a program, or software that collects or processes personal
23 identifying information with Internet connectivity.

24 (b) "Digital service provider" means a person who:



25 (i) Owns or operates a digital service;
26 (ii) Determines the purpose of collecting and
27 processing the personal identifying information of users of the
28 digital service; and

29 (iii) Determines the means used to collect and
30 process the personal identifying information of users of the
31 digital service.

32 (c) "Harmful material" means material that is harmful
33 to minors as defined by Section 11-77-3(d).

34 (d) "Known minor" means a child who is younger than
35 eighteen (18) years of age who has not had the disabilities of
36 minority removed for general purposes, and who the digital service
37 provider knows to be a minor.

38 (e) "Personal identifying information" means any
39 information, including sensitive information, that is linked or
40 reasonably linkable to an identified or identifiable individual.
41 The term includes pseudonymous information when the information is
42 used by a controller or processor in conjunction with additional
43 information that reasonably links the information to an identified
44 or identifiable individual. The term does not include
45 deidentified information or publicly available information.

46 **SECTION 3.** (1) This act applies only to a digital service
47 provider who provides a digital service that:

48 (a) Connects users in a manner that allows users to
49 socially interact with other users on the digital service;



50 (b) Allows a user to create a public, semi-public or
51 private profile for purposes of signing into and using the digital
52 service; and

53 (c) Allows a user to create or post content that can be
54 viewed by other users of the digital service, including sharing
55 content on:

56 (i) A message board;

57 (ii) A chat room; or

58 (iii) A landing page, video channel or main feed
59 that presents to a user content created and posted by other users.

60 (2) This act does not apply to:

61 (a) A digital service provider who processes or
62 maintains user data in connection with the employment, promotion,
63 reassignment or retention of the user as an employee or
64 independent contractor, to the extent that the user's data is
65 processed or maintained for that purpose;

66 (b) A digital service provider's provision of a digital
67 service that facilitates e-mail or direct messaging services, if
68 the digital service facilitates only those services;

69 (c) A digital service provider's provision of a digital
70 service that:

71 (i) Primarily functions to provide a user with
72 access to news, sports, commerce, online video games or content
73 primarily generated or selected by the digital service provider;

74 and



75 (ii) Allows chat, comment or other interactive
76 functionality that is incidental to the digital service; or

77 (d) A digital service provider's provision of a digital
78 service that primarily functions to provide a user with access to
79 career development opportunities, including:

80 (i) Professional networking;

81 (ii) Job skills;

82 (iii) Learning certifications;

83 (iv) Job posting; and

84 (v) Application services.

85 (3) The Internet service provider, Internet service
86 provider's affiliate or subsidiary, search engine or cloud service
87 provider is not considered to be a digital service provider or to
88 offer a digital service if the Internet service provider or
89 provider's affiliate or subsidiary, search engine or cloud service
90 provider solely provides access or connection, including through
91 transmission, download, intermediate storage, access software or
92 other service, to an Internet website or to other information or
93 content:

94 (a) On the Internet; or

95 (b) On a facility, system or network not under the
96 control of the Internet service provider, provider's affiliate or
97 subsidiary, search engine or cloud service provider.

98 **SECTION 4.** (1) A digital service provider may not enter
99 into an agreement with a person to create an account with a



100 digital service unless the person has registered the person's age
101 with the digital service provider. A digital service provider
102 shall make commercially reasonable efforts to verify the age of
103 the person creating an account with a level of certainty
104 appropriate to the risks that arise from the information
105 management practices of the digital service provider.

106 (2) A digital service provider shall not permit an account
107 holder who is a known minor to be an account holder unless the
108 known minor has the express consent from a parent or guardian.
109 Acceptable methods of obtaining express consent of a parent or
110 guardian include any of the following:

111 (a) Providing a form for the minor's parent or guardian
112 to sign and return to the digital service provider by common
113 carrier, facsimile, or electronic scan;

114 (b) Providing a toll-free telephone number for the
115 known minor's parent or guardian to call to consent;

116 (c) Coordinating a call with a known minor's parent or
117 guardian over video conferencing technology;

118 (d) Collecting information related to the
119 government-issued identification of the known minor's parent or
120 guardian and deleting that information after confirming the
121 identity of the known minor's parent or guardian;

122 (e) Allowing the known minor's parent or guardian to
123 provide consent by responding to an email and taking additional



124 steps to verify the identity of the known minor's parent or
125 guardian; or

126 (f) Any other commercially reasonable method of
127 obtaining consent in light of available technology.

128 **SECTION 5.** (1) A digital service provider that enters into
129 an agreement with a known minor for access to a digital service
130 shall:

131 (a) Limit collection of the known minor's personal
132 identifying information to information reasonably necessary to
133 provide the digital service; and

134 (b) Limit use of the known minor's personal identifying
135 information to the purpose for which the information was
136 collected.

137 (2) A digital service provider that enters into an agreement
138 with a known minor for access to a digital service may not:

139 (a) Use the digital service to collect the known
140 minor's precise geolocation data;

141 (b) Use the digital service to display targeted
142 advertising involving harmful material to the known minor; or

143 (c) Share, disclose or sell the known minor's personal
144 identifying information unless required to:

145 (i) Comply with a civil, criminal or regulatory
146 inquiry, investigation, subpoena or summons by a governmental
147 entity;

148 (ii) Comply with a law enforcement investigation;



- 149 (iii) Detect, block or prevent the distribution of
150 unlawful, obscene or other harmful material to a known minor;
151 (iv) Block or filter spam;
152 (v) Prevent criminal activity; or
153 (vi) Protect the security of a digital service.

154 **SECTION 6.** (1) In relation to a known minor's use of a
155 digital service, a digital service provider shall make
156 commercially reasonable efforts to develop and implement a
157 strategy to prevent or mitigate the known minor's exposure to
158 harmful material and other content that promotes or facilitates
159 the following harms to minors:

160 (a) Consistent with evidence-informed medical
161 information, the following: self-harm, eating disorders,
162 substance use disorders, and suicidal behaviors;

163 (b) Patterns of use that indicate or encourage
164 substance abuse or use of illegal drugs;

165 (c) Stalking, physical violence, online bullying, or
166 harassment;

167 (d) Grooming, trafficking, child pornography, or other
168 sexual exploitation or abuse;

169 (e) Incitement of violence; or

170 (f) Any other illegal activity.

171 (2) Nothing in subsection (1) shall be construed to require
172 a digital service provider to prevent or preclude:



173 (a) Any minor from deliberately and independently
174 searching for, or specifically requesting, content; or

175 (b) The digital service provider or individuals on the
176 digital service from providing resources for the prevention or
177 mitigation of the harms described in subsection (1), including
178 evidence-informed information and clinical resources.

179 **SECTION 7.** (1) Except as provided by subsection (2) of this
180 section, this act may not be construed as providing a basis for,
181 or being subject to, a private right of action for a violation of
182 this act.

183 (2) If a digital service provider violates this act, the
184 parent or guardian of a known minor affected by that violation may
185 bring a cause of action seeking:

186 (a) A declaratory judgment under Rule 57 of Mississippi
187 Rules of Civil Procedure; or

188 (b) An injunction against the digital service provider.

189 (3) A court may not certify an action brought under this
190 section as a class action.

191 **SECTION 8.** Section 75-24-5, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
192 amended as follows:

193 75-24-5. (1) Unfair methods of competition affecting
194 commerce and unfair or deceptive trade practices in or affecting
195 commerce are prohibited. Action may be brought under Section
196 75-24-5(1) only under the provisions of Section 75-24-9.



197 (2) Without limiting the scope of subsection (1) of this
198 section, the following unfair methods of competition and unfair or
199 deceptive trade practices or acts in the conduct of any trade or
200 commerce are hereby prohibited:

201 (a) Passing off goods or services as those of another;

202 (b) Misrepresentation of the source, sponsorship,
203 approval, or certification of goods or services;

204 (c) Misrepresentation of affiliation, connection, or
205 association with, or certification by another;

206 (d) Misrepresentation of designations of geographic
207 origin in connection with goods or services;

208 (e) Representing that goods or services have
209 sponsorship, approval, characteristics, ingredients, uses,
210 benefits, or quantities that they do not have or that a person has
211 a sponsorship, approval, status, affiliation, or connection that
212 he does not have;

213 (f) Representing that goods are original or new if they
214 are reconditioned, reclaimed, used, or secondhand;

215 (g) Representing that goods or services are of a
216 particular standard, quality, or grade, or that goods are of a
217 particular style or model, if they are of another;

218 (h) Disparaging the goods, services, or business of
219 another by false or misleading representation of fact;

220 (i) Advertising goods or services with intent not to
221 sell them as advertised;



222 (j) Advertising goods or services with intent not to
223 supply reasonably expectable public demand, unless the
224 advertisement discloses a limitation of quantity;

225 (k) Misrepresentations of fact concerning the reasons
226 for, existence of, or amounts of price reductions;

227 (l) Advertising by or on behalf of any licensed or
228 regulated health care professional which does not specifically
229 describe the license or qualifications of the licensed or
230 regulated health care professional;

231 (m) Charging an increased premium for reinstating a
232 motor vehicle insurance policy that was cancelled or suspended by
233 the insured solely for the reason that he was transferred out of
234 this state while serving in the United States Armed Forces or on
235 active duty in the National Guard or United States Armed Forces
236 Reserve. It is also an unfair practice for an insurer to charge
237 an increased premium for a new motor vehicle insurance policy if
238 the applicant for coverage or his covered dependents were
239 previously insured with a different insurer and canceled that
240 policy solely for the reason that he was transferred out of this
241 state while serving in the United States Armed Forces or on active
242 duty in the National Guard or United States Armed Forces Reserve.
243 For purposes of determining premiums, an insurer shall consider
244 such persons as having maintained continuous coverage. The
245 provisions of this paragraph (m) shall apply only to such



246 instances when the insured does not drive the vehicle during the
247 period of cancellation or suspension of his policy;

248 (n) Violating the provisions of Section 75-24-8; * * *

249 (o) Violating the provisions of Section 73-3-38 * * *;

250 (p) Violating any of the provisions of Sections 1
251 through 6 of House Bill No. 728, 2024 Regular Session, as approved
252 by the Governor; and

253 (q) Violating any of the provisions of Sections 1
254 through 7 of this act.

255 **SECTION 9.** Section 97-5-31, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
256 amended as follows:

257 97-5-31. As used in Sections 97-5-33 through 97-5-37, the
258 following words and phrases shall have the meanings given to them
259 in this section:

260 (a) "Child" means any individual who has not attained
261 the age of eighteen (18) years and is an identifiable child.

262 (b) "Sexually explicit conduct" means actual, morphed
263 or simulated:

264 (i) Oral genital contact, oral anal contact, or
265 sexual intercourse as defined in Section 97-3-65, whether between
266 persons of the same or opposite sex;

267 (ii) Bestiality;

268 (iii) Masturbation;

269 (iv) Sadistic or masochistic abuse;



270 (v) Lascivious exhibition of the genitals or pubic
271 area of any person; or

272 (vi) Fondling or other erotic touching of the
273 genitals, pubic area, buttocks, anus or breast.

274 (c) "Producing" means producing, directing,
275 manufacturing, issuing, publishing, morphing or advertising.

276 (d) "Visual depiction" includes, without limitation,
277 developed or undeveloped film and video tape or other visual
278 unaltered, altered or morphed reproductions by computer and
279 technology.

280 (e) "Computer" has the meaning given in Title 18,
281 United States Code, Section 1030.

282 (f) "Morphed image" means any visual depiction or
283 representation, including any photograph, film, video, picture, or
284 computer or computer-generated image or picture, whether made or
285 produced by electronic, mechanical, simulated or other means, of
286 sexually explicit conduct, where such visual depiction or
287 representation has been created, adapted, or modified to appear an
288 identifiable minor is engaging in sexual conduct or sexually
289 explicit activity to appearing in a state of sexually explicit
290 nudity.

291 (* * *g) "Simulated" means any depicting of the
292 genitals or rectal areas that gives the appearance of sexual
293 conduct or incipient sexual conduct.



294 (h) "Identifiable child" means a child who was a minor
295 at the time the image was created, adapted, or modified or whose
296 image as a child was used in the creating, adapting or modifying
297 of the image; and is recognizable as an actual child by the
298 child's face, likeness, or other distinguishing characteristic,
299 such as a unique birthmark or other recognizable feature. The
300 provisions of this paragraph (h) shall not be construed to require
301 proof of the actual identity of the identifiable child.

302 **SECTION 10.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
303 and after July 1, 2024.

