



RELEASE: Garden State Equality and Planned Parenthood Action Fund of NJ Call On State Legislature To Reject Restrictions on Internet Access

January 4, 2024 / Featured, Press Release

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Joined By ACLU-NJ, NJ State Chamber of Commerce, The Trevor Project, Chamber of Progress & Over 45 Others, Groups Send Letter Urging Lawmakers To Vote No On A5750/S4215

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 4, 2024

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TRENTON, NJ – Garden State Equality and Planned Parenthood Action Fund of NJ today urged the State Legislature to reject a bill that would impose highly restrictive regulations on Internet access. The bill, A5750/S4215, would have New Jersey join the ranks of states like Utah and Arkansas by requiring age verification for anyone using social media. Joined by the ACLU of New

Jersey, the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, the Trevor Project, Chamber of Progress and more than 30 additional esteemed individuals and statewide and national organizations, the groups sent a letter this morning to all state legislators stating their firm opposition to the measure.

The letter outlines several distinct and clear reasons why A5750/S4215 would be bad for all New Jerseyans. First and foremost, the legislation is a direct threat to the First Amendment free speech rights of all New Jersey social media users, regardless of age. Moreover, a federal judge blocked similar legislation in Arkansas last fall due to its [violation of rights](#). A Utah law that creates similar restrictions is also currently being challenged as [unconstitutional](#).

Similar laws or proposed bills across the country are being supported by anti-LGBTQ groups, like Focus on the Family, that do not reflect New Jersey's values. Do New Jersey legislators really want our state to follow the path of Utah, Arkansas and Focus on the Family?

Lastly, the letter argues that trying to push this deeply flawed legislation through now, during the last days of the lame duck session, would deny the public the much more thoughtful, nuanced discussion issues like this deserve. Ramming it through during the final hours of this session will create long-lasting, unintended consequences.

A copy of the letter submitted today is below.

Dear Members of the New Jersey Senate and Assembly,

We, the undersigned, represent a broad range of organizations, companies and community members who have come together to express our grave concerns on, and opposition to, A5750/S4215, a bill that would require age-verification for anyone using social media in New Jersey.

*This bill purports to address minors' access to social media without parental permission. However, this legislation threatens the free speech rights of **ALL** New Jersey social media users; it forces everyone to hand over private data or lose the ability to participate in robust online conversations and communities.*

Social media has evolved over the years, and now people – of all ages – rely on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube for news, to create art, express themselves, find community and more. There are many users who may want to engage in anonymous speech, or who are concerned about their privacy – age verification would cut all of these people off from social media, even if they are over the age of 17. Not to mention, the parental consent requirement violates the First Amendment rights of young people.

Any restrictions to accessing the internet will cut off entire populations – oftentimes the most vulnerable populations – who need access to information, including:

- **Immigrant communities** who may fear they are putting themselves at risk of deportation by providing this information. This requirement would lock immigrant communities out of parts of the internet essential for creating community, accessing information and services to meet their needs.
- **LGBTQ+ youth** who may not have supportive parents or guardians may be cut off from access to mental health support, community, and information regarding their health, resources which have been proven to be critical for many in the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Patients seeking reproductive healthcare** may want to be anonymous when seeking out health care organizations, information and resources, which often happens on social media platforms.
- **Domestic violence victims**, where anonymity can be critical when seeking out services, support, help and advice, especially for individuals who do not have access to their documentation due to abusive partners.
- **People in the disability community** who may not have access to a government ID but for whom the internet provides a source of community, independence and access to the world they may not otherwise have.
- **Senior Citizens** who may not possess the technical skills required to process age verification, but whom rely heavily on this technology to remain connected to family and services.

Finally, on August 31, 2023 a federal judge blocked a similar law from taking effect in Arkansas on the grounds that such a broad law, requiring all social media users to identify themselves to tech companies, would likely be unconstitutional.

Ironically, at the same time that this bill is proceeding in the legislature, there is also a bill to limit the personal data that social media platforms are allowed to request and store.

A5750/S4215 is antithetical to the aims of any good privacy legislation.

While each of our organizations oppose this bill for various reasons, we can all agree that this bill is moving too fast in lame-duck, needs further consideration of its unintended consequences and the topic is worthy of a longer, more nuanced discussion that the lame duck time period does not afford us.

We urge you to not pass this bill and work with advocates to address the real privacy and security concerns facing New Jerseyans of all ages.

Sincerely,

*New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce
ACLU of New Jersey
Chamber of Progress
Cherry Hill Women's Center
Computer & Communications Industry Association
EducateUS
EMERGE NJ
Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County
Fair Share Housing Center
Faith In New Jersey
Fight for the Future
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE)
Garden State Equality
Gloucester County NAACP #2345
Guston & Guston LLP
HiTOPS, Inc.
Hyacinth Inc.
Indivisible Central New Jersey
Latina Civic Action
Law Office of Jamie M. Zug
Law Office of Leslie A. Farber
League of Women Voters New Jersey
LGBT Tech
MACTA (Madison Area Call to Action)
Make It Better For Youth
Make the Road NJ
Melinated Moms
National Council of Jewish Women New Jersey
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
Newark Communities for Accountable Policing
NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence
Northern New Jersey NOWOneNJ7
Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey
Planned Parenthood Generation Action at Drew University
Planned Parenthood Generation Action at Rutgers
Planned Parenthood Generation Action at TCNJ
Princeton College Democrats
Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA)
South Jersey Regional NOW, Alice Paul Chapter
The Trevor Project
UU Faith Action NJ
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Working Families Association of NJ
Derek Demeri, Rutgers Law
Diane Dresdale*

Ms. Ellen Ellowitch, NJCW
Mrs. Andrea Mintz, NJCW
Catherine M. Mirra, NCJW
Dr. Joeigh Perella
Grace Sumka, NCJW
Dr. Jessica Zirkel-Rubin

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About Garden State Equality

Garden State Equality is the largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization in New Jersey, with over 150,000 members. Established in 2004, they are now one of the most successful statewide LGBTQ+ civil rights organizations in the nation. Their services include advocacy, policy work, and trainings. They work to address safe environments for youth, improvement of health services that meet LGBTQ+ community needs, and respectful treatment of seniors. Beyond that, Garden State Equality supports New Jersey's activist community by bringing an LGBTQ+ lens to the shared struggle for justice.

About Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey

Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey is a nonpartisan, independent, 501(c)(4) non-profit social welfare organization, and the advocacy arm of the Planned Parenthood affiliates in NJ: Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan New Jersey (www.ppmnj.org) and Planned Parenthood of Northern, Central, and Southern New Jersey (www.ppnscnj.org). The organization advocates for access to essential health care through education, activism, voter engagement, grassroots organizing, and legislative advocacy.

About ACLU of New Jersey

For over 60 years, the **ACLU of New Jersey** has defended liberty and justice guided by the vision of a fair and equitable New Jersey for all. Their mission is to preserve, advance, and extend the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every New Jerseyan by the state and federal constitutions in courts, in the legislature, and in our communities.

About the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce

The New Jersey Chamber of Commerce is a business advocacy association based in Trenton that lobbies key stakeholders for legislation and policies designed to make New Jersey a desirable state to operate a business and establish good-paying jobs. Chamber member companies receive exclusive invitations to events that offer valuable networking and educational opportunities.

About The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention nonprofit organization for LGBTQ young people. They provide information & support to LGBTQ young people 24/7, all year round.

About the Chamber of Progress

Chamber of Progress (progresschamber.org) is a center-left tech industry policy coalition promoting technology's progressive future. They work to ensure that all Americans benefit from technological leaps, and that the tech industry operates responsibly and fairly. Their corporate partners do not have a vote on or veto over their positions. They do not speak for individual partner companies and remain true to their stated principles even when their partners disagree.

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