

Meta bribes Congress with stock market perks for protection from child-harm lawsuits

· Reuters
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(Reuters) - Meta Platforms has lobbied the U.S. Congress for legal immunity from child-harm claims tied to social media products such as Instagram, as it faces thousands of lawsuits from young users and their families, according to a source familiar with the matter and proposed legislative language reviewed by Reuters.

If adopted by lawmakers and passed into law as part of the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) under consideration in the U.S. Senate, such a provision could undermine thousands of lawsuits against Meta and other online platforms over harms to children. Meta and Google's YouTube face a combined \$6 million in damages after they lost the first case at trial early this year.

While legislators have given no indication of adopting the language, the lobbying effort shows the kind of legal protections Meta is seeking amid the biggest attempt to regulate online platforms in the U.S. since the 1990s.

The proposed language reviewed by Reuters would make online companies "immune from suit or liability under state law with respect to all claims for loss caused by, arising out of, relating to, or resulting

from the safety or privacy of individuals under the age of eighteen online or otherwise related to the provisions" of KOSA. The provision appears alongside language that would preempt state laws on children's online safety and privacy.

Asked about the lobbying effort and the proposed language, Meta spokesperson Stephanie Otway said the provision "does not extinguish existing lawsuits, nor does it represent blanket immunity."

"Instead, it establishes uniform national standards for online youth safety, ensuring these critical issues are governed by comprehensive federal legislation, not plaintiffs' lawyers or patchwork state legislation," she said.

Julia Duncan of the American Association for Justice, a group that represents trial lawyers, said that if passed, however, the provision would knock out any lawsuits pending when the law took effect.

"The language is pretty clear-cut immunity against every parent, every school district, that is seeking to hold any [AI](#) or social media company accountable for harm" to children, Duncan said. "There is no other way to read this language."

Meta has proposed the language in exchange for dropping its opposition to KOSA, the source said. The bill, sponsored by U.S. Senators Marsha Blackburn, a Republican, and Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, would require social media companies to take reasonable steps to prevent certain harms to minors, such as compulsive use of their platforms.

The bill is now part of negotiations between Blackburn and the White House to package child online safety bills with a provision that would preempt some state laws on artificial intelligence.

A Blackburn spokesperson, asked about the specific liability provision reviewed by Reuters, said: "We have not seen that proposed language and would never consider it."

Under KOSA, companies would be required to exercise care in deploying specific features including infinite scrolling, activity notifications and appearance-altering photo filters.

A California woman won at trial against Meta and YouTube earlier this year when her lawyers argued the companies knew such features were addictive and harmful to youth. The companies plan to appeal against the decision.

KOSA passed in the Senate in a 91-3 vote in 2024, but failed in the U.S. House of Representatives. It was reintroduced this year with support from both U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, a Republican, and U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat.

(Reporting by Jody Godoy in New York; Editing by Chris Sanders and Edmund Klamann)