

24 August 2026

Netsafe statement on Government's Social Media Age-Restriction Bill

Netsafe welcomes the Government's move to strengthen protections for young people online and supports changes to the current legislative framework that can help reduce online harm and better support children, young people, parents and caregivers.

However, this is an important and complex issue, and we believe the detail of the proposed legislation needs careful scrutiny.

This is not an issue that should be rushed through. The select committee process will be an important opportunity to properly examine the proposed approach, hear from young people, parents, experts and other stakeholders, and consider how the legislation would work in practice.

There are also important questions about the proposed regulatory framework, including the role of the Department of Internal Affairs. The question of who oversees and enforces any new requirements, and how that oversight is structured, deserves careful consideration. Independence, accountability and the ability to respond to a rapidly changing online environment will be important principles in determining what an effective regulatory framework looks like.

Netsafe also cautions against viewing age as a simple proxy for online safety. Age restrictions may form part of the response to online harm, but they are not a complete solution. Young people also need the knowledge, skills and support to navigate online environments safely, while platforms need to take greater responsibility for preventing and responding to harm.

This is an important opportunity to have a broader conversation about what meaningful online safety for young people should look like – not simply whether someone is above or below a particular age.

Netsafe has more than 25 years' experience supporting New Zealanders with online safety and responds to around 25,000 calls in relation to online harm every year. We look forward to contributing that experience to the discussion as the legislation progresses and the detail of the proposed framework is considered.

Protecting young people online is too important to get wrong, and the focus should remain firmly on what will genuinely reduce harm and improve their safety. Netsafe will continue to support all New Zealanders regardless.

--ENDS--

For further information, please contact:

Vicki Griffin | Consultant | Boyd Public Relations Ltd,
m: 027 661 2411 | e: vicki@boydpr.co.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent charitable organisation supporting people in Aotearoa to have safe and positive online experiences. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education.

Support available

Netsafe provides free, confidential support to anyone experiencing online harm, including unwanted digital contact, harassment and bullying.

Contact Netsafe:

Online report: <https://netsafe.org.nz/report/>

Email: help@netsafe.org.nz

Text: 4282

Free phone: 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) Available 9 am–5 pm weekdays