# Revisions to safer phones bill limit children’s smartphone regulations



Legislation aimed at limiting children's use of smartphones to mitigate the risks associated with addictive social media platforms has encountered significant revisions, curtailing its initial scope. The Safer Phones Bill, introduced by Labour MP Josh MacAlister, sought to enhance protections for individuals under the age of 16 from potentially harmful digital content found on platforms like TikTok and Snapchat.

Originally, the legislative proposal intended to raise the age for online data consent from 13 to 16, mandate schools to prohibit mobile phones, and bolster the regulatory authority of Ofcom to safeguard children against addictive applications. Furthermore, it included a commitment from the Government to assess the feasibility of restricting smartphone sales to minors.

However, following suggestions from government ministers exhibiting reservations about the original measures, the Bill has been modified. It is now set to shift its focus towards research rather than immediate regulatory action. Specifically, the updated version emphasises the development of guidance from the UK’s chief medical officers for parents regarding their children’s smartphone use and the establishment of a government plan to examine the impact of social media on young users.

The modifications arise amidst indications of opposition from key government figures, including Digital Secretary Peter Kyle and Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson. Mr Kyle, in particular, reportedly stands against any substantial legislation perceived as a second Online Safety Act, an initiative some advocates seek to implement. Additionally, the provision to ban mobile phones in schools has been discarded, following Ms Phillipson’s objections.

Sources suggest that the government prioritises further study on the influences of mobile technology on teenagers, rather than imposing strict regulations at this time. The revised Bill, now more focused on research initiatives, is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on Friday, with cross-party support from MPs and child protection advocates.

In light of the changes, Mr MacAlister expressed that this iteration of the Bill signifies a crucial step for the Government in acknowledging the widespread ramifications of excessive smartphone and social media usage among children. “It will be the first meaningful step from a UK government to engage with the widespread impacts of excessive smartphone and social media use by children,” he stated in comments to the Daily Mail.

Recent polling conducted by More in Common indicated that 74% of respondents favoured a ban on social media for users under the age of 16. Should the Government opt to advance MacAlister's measure as anticipated, he has indicated that he would refrain from insisting on a vote. The ongoing debate underscores the complex challenges of balancing technological advancements with child welfare as policymakers navigate the evolving digital landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://saferphonesbill.co.uk> - This URL provides information about the Safer Phones Bill introduced by Josh MacAlister MP, which aims to reduce the addictive nature of smartphones for children. It highlights the growing concern over the impact of smartphones on children's mental health and learning.
* <https://safescreens.org/safer-phones-bill/> - This site supports Josh MacAlister's Safer Phones Bill and details its goals to protect children from excessive smartphone use and addictive apps. It mentions the Bill's potential to become law with cross-party support.
* <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/news/smartphones-now-an-integral-part-of-our-lives-teenagers-tell-mp-behind-new-bill/> - This article discusses a meeting where teenagers shared their views on smartphone use with Josh MacAlister MP, emphasizing its integral role in their lives. It also mentions considerations for raising the digital age of consent.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides the original article discussing the Safer Phones Bill and its revisions, highlighting the shift from regulatory action to research and guidance on smartphone use for children.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/> - This URL could provide updates on parliamentary debates and bills, including discussions around the Safer Phones Bill and its progress in the House of Commons.