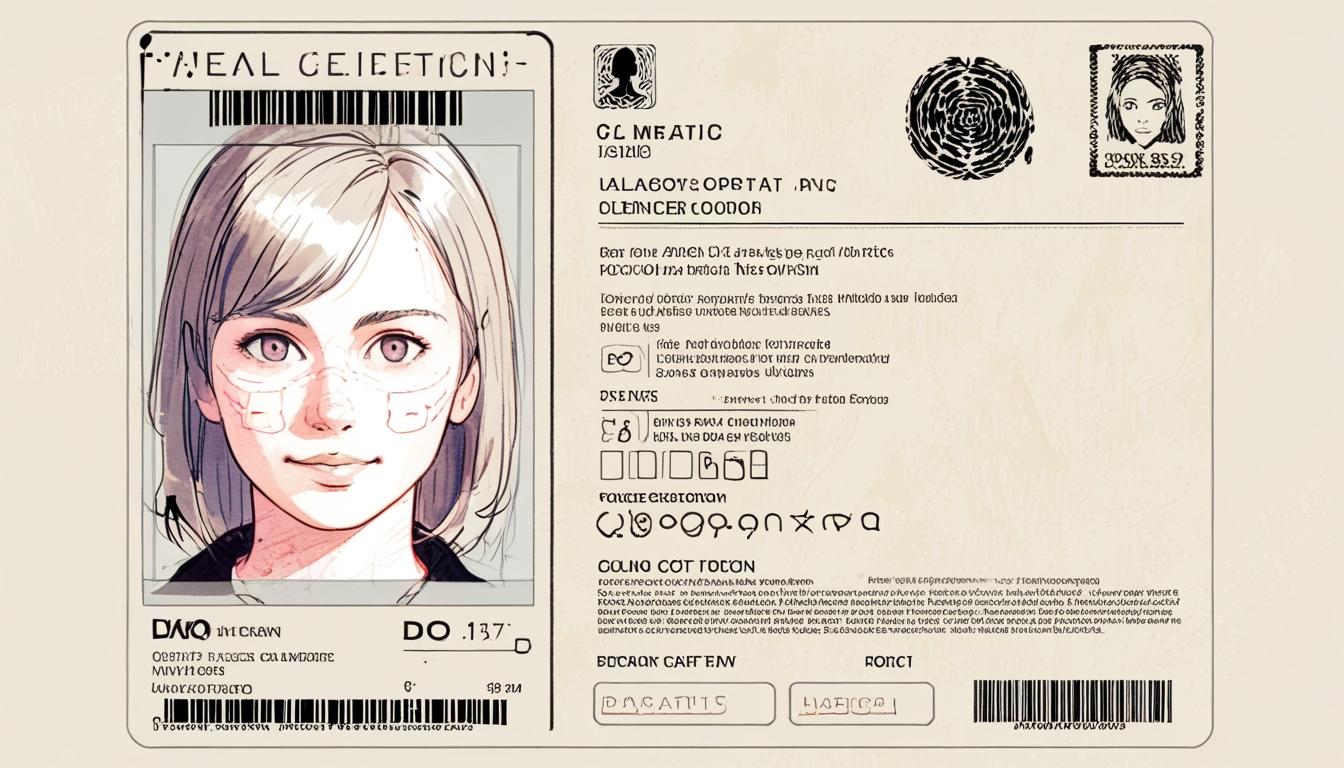
# Arizona bill on online age verification for adult content sparks debate over censorship and privacy



A legislative effort in Arizona has brought the contentious issue of online age verification for adult content into the spotlight, raising complex questions about censorship, privacy, and the definition of harmful material. House Bill 2112, sponsored by Republican Representative Nick Kupper of Surprise, aims to require individuals to verify that they are at least 18 years old before accessing pornography online. This measure echoes similar bills introduced in a number of states across the United States where conservative lawmakers have sought to restrict access to pornographic material, often as part of broader initiatives under the banner of Project 2025.

The legislation is currently navigating the bill-to-law process; it was retained from a Senate Committee of the Whole calendar as of 17 April. While the bill enjoys backing from members across the political spectrum, it has also attracted criticism, particularly from advocates who caution that its language and requirements may have far-reaching implications beyond simply limiting access to adult websites by minors.

Mike Stabile, public policy director of the Free Speech Coalition, a trade and advocacy group representing the adult entertainment industry and its workers, has testified twice against HB 2112 at the Arizona Capitol during the past winter session. Speaking to The Lookout, Stabile described the bill as “a Trojan horse” that goes beyond protecting minors and instead functions as a broad form of internet censorship.

“These bills are introduced ostensibly to prevent minors from accessing pornography,” Stabile explained. “But the definition of ‘sexual material harmful to minors’ is incredibly broad and has been used in other states to remove LGBTQ+ books from libraries, threaten librarians with arrest, ban drag shows, and even target corporations over pride displays.”

Stabile raised concerns about the invasive nature of the age verification process mandated by such laws. “There’s no way to age-verify minors exclusively; everyone who visits the site would have to undergo invasive biometric procedures, such as facial scans, uploading identification documents, or background checks,” he said. Additionally, he warned that the broad definition of harmful material may be applied to websites with LGBTQ+ content or reproductive health information, potentially subjecting them to the same scrutiny and restrictions.

Arizona’s HB 2112 includes a provision that allows parents to bring civil lawsuits to collect damages if certain content is accessed by their children. This private right of action is part of a trend seen in other states, where lawsuits can be filed not only by state attorneys general but also by private individuals. Stabile noted that this could place considerable legal and financial burdens on small websites and retailers, pushing them toward self-censorship to avoid costly litigation.

“Small websites or booksellers could face lawsuits costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees, which encourages them to pre-emptively censor their content,” Stabile observed. He cited ongoing legislation in Texas with similar language affecting booksellers, which has resulted in litigation threats over materials including classic and contemporary literary works with LGBTQ+ themes.

Legislative measures like HB 2112 are not unique to Arizona. At least 20 states are reported to have introduced or passed laws targeting online access to adult material. Stabile, with three decades of experience as a queer activist, expressed his concern that these laws are part of a broader push to label a wide range of topics—including "gender ideology," sex education, and literature addressing sexual abuse—as pornography. With the U.S. Supreme Court currently reviewing related cases, such as one in Texas, the legal landscape surrounding these issues remains unsettled.

The challenge, Stabile explained, lies in balancing effective age restriction with protecting adult consumers’ rights and other content producers’ freedoms. “When adult websites comply with age-verification laws, they often lose 95% of their visitors because most people are unwilling to submit biometric data or IDs,” he said. “Users simply turn to websites based outside the United States that do not comply with these laws or to platforms exempted from them.”

Regarding the origin of these legislative efforts, Stabile identified organisations such as the Heritage Foundation as influential in drafting model bills that have been adopted across various states. He pointed out that a more efficient and less intrusive approach to blocking minors from adult content is at the device level—using parental controls or restrictions built into personal devices—rather than requiring invasive verification processes on the websites themselves.

“Age verification at the device level is more effective at keeping minors out without burdening adults or threatening the rights of non-adult content producers,” Stabile said. He also highlighted an unintended consequence of these laws: driving traffic to illicit sites hosting illegal content like revenge porn and child sexual abuse material, often operating outside U.S. legal jurisdiction.

As HB 2112 continues through the Arizona legislature, the debate it has sparked reflects wider national tensions over internet regulation, free expression, and the role of government in managing access to content online. The Lookout will continue to monitor developments concerning this bill and its implications for residents of Arizona and beyond.

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

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