# Debate on children's digital safety stalls in Parliament



The ongoing debate on children's digital safety in schools has reached a distressing impasse in Parliament, with the Protection of Children (Digital Safety and Data Protection) Bill being adjourned without any significant advancements. Introduced by Labour MP Josh MacAlister, this private member's Bill aims to tackle alarming concerns regarding excessive screen time and the unchecked influence of social media on children.

Former Conservative education secretary Kit Malthouse rightly condemned the current state of the Bill, which he deemed a “hollowed-out gesture” that has been “gutting” in its execution. Originally designed to enforce guidance from chief medical officers on managing children’s smartphone use and to reconsider the age at which children can consent to their data being shared, this Bill reflects a lost opportunity to champion the wellbeing of the nation’s youth. It is becoming increasingly evident that the Labour government is more willing to capitulate to big tech interests rather than protect our children from potential harms.

Mr. MacAlister’s comments on the staggering amount of time children spend on smartphones—averaging 21 hours a week for a 12-year-old—emphasize the pressing need for strict regulatory measures. This pressing issue should be equated with past legislative efforts to combat smoking and improve vehicle safety, suggesting that the government's feeble attempts are a disservice to future generations.

Sir Ashley Fox's assertion that MacAlister faced undue pressure to water down such critical legislation captures the reality of the Labour government's fecklessness in this domain. Their lack of courage in championing robust protection for children's digital safety is nothing short of alarming.

While discussions included hopeful voices such as Caroline Voaden from the Liberal Democrats, her aspirations for the Bill to serve as a foundation for broader reforms are hindered by the Labour Party’s weak approach. Labour MP Lola McEvoy’s calls to ban smartphones outright in schools reflect the urgent need for decisive action—a call her government consistently fails to heed.

In stark contrast, Damian Hinds, a Conservative and former education secretary, highlighted the ignorance of delaying legislative action due to a lack of conclusive evidence concerning digital harms. His insistence on prioritizing safeguards for children’s wellbeing is a critical voice amidst a government that appears reluctant to act decisively for fear of upsetting entrenched interests.

Data Protection Minister Sir Chris Bryant's acknowledgment of the need for action does little to assuage concerns about a tepid commitment to protect vulnerable populations. Although he pointed to the Online Safety Act and upcoming regulations, the reality remains that the government's half-hearted measures are inadequate for the magnitude of the problem at hand.

As the debate paused, with plans to reconvene on July 11, one thing is clear: the issue of children's digital safety demands urgent and meaningful solutions, not the hollow promises we have come to expect from a government that is failing its most vulnerable citizens. The tide is turning, and it is time for the political landscape to reflect the urgent need for a proactive and protective stance on this pressing issue.

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

## References

* <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/how-the-online-safety-act-will-help-to-protect-children/> - This URL supports the claim that the Online Safety Act aims to protect children by requiring tech firms to assess risks and implement measures to mitigate harm, including the use of age-checks to restrict access to harmful content.
* <https://5rightsfoundation.com/new-uk-bill-to-strengthen-regulations-protecting-children-online/> - This URL corroborates the introduction of the Protection of Children (Digital Safety and Data Protection) Bill by Josh MacAlister, which seeks to strengthen online safety and data protection for children.
* <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2025/02/investigations-announced-into-how-social-media-and-video-sharing-platforms-use-uk-children-s-personal-information/> - This URL highlights investigations into how social media platforms use children's personal information, emphasizing the need for robust data protection measures.
* <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/how-the-online-safety-act-will-help-to-protect-children/> - This URL further explains how the Online Safety Act requires companies to protect children from online harms, including bullying and illegal content.
* <https://5rightsfoundation.com/new-uk-bill-to-strengthen-regulations-protecting-children-online/> - This URL also discusses the Age Appropriate Design Code and its role in ensuring digital services are designed with children's safety in mind.