



# JARED PATTERSON

TEXAS STATE REPRESENTATIVE • DISTRICT 106

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## REP. PATTERSON FILES LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE TO PROTECT TEXANS FROM THE DANGERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

(Austin, TX) — Social media has proven to be harmful to the mental health of its users, particularly to adolescents. Virtually every study, even by the social media companies themselves, has shown record levels of self-harm, suicide ideation, anxiety, depression, and other forms of mental health emergencies amongst young people. Moreover, apps like TikTok, which is owned by ByteDance, create national security concerns which FBI Director Chris Wray expressed before Congress just a few months ago.

In response to serious concerns about youth mental health, privacy, and national security, Representative Jared Patterson announced a legislative package responding to the known threats to Texans across the state. The bill package includes HB 896, HB 2155, HB 2206, and HCR 46.

**HB 896:** This bill prohibits social media companies from allowing minors to create accounts on their platforms. Like age restrictions in place for tobacco, alcohol, purchasing handguns, or agreeing to contracts, these age restrictions are geared to protect the health and safety of the Texans most harmed by social media products. The bill would require social media companies to verify the age of their users. Moreover, it would give parents the control to eliminate the social media accounts of their children. In addition to mental health concerns, it is established legal precedent that minors do not possess the ability to agree to the terms and conditions of social media user agreements, which often times allows these companies to harvest significant personal data from young people without expressed consent.

**HB 2155:** This bill seeks to ban the use of social media algorithms targeting minors, the largest weapon and most dangerous aspect of social media technology. The algorithm technology observes and learns exactly what the user desires, sometimes leading down dark paths of consistent content which can influence ideas of self-harm, body dysmorphia, and suicide. Recently, the Wall Street Journal registered on TikTok as a 13-year-old and was shown 569 videos glorifying drug use, including cocaine and meth, promotional videos about selling drugs online, and more than 100 videos from accounts recommending paid pornography websites.

In addition to machine-learned algorithms targeting children, some social media sites have allegedly hired child psychiatrists to better hook users on their product – similar to how a drug dealer would hope to hook their users. By removing the use of algorithms on minors and establishing financial penalties for violations, the harmful targeted technology that social media companies are currently using to form addictions to the suggested content on the platforms can be stopped before more children are exploited.



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**HB 2206:** This bill seeks to restrict social media operation from dangerous foreign actors who may use the platforms to spy on Texans and Texas-based companies. One most recent example is TikTok, which Governor Abbott recently banned from state agencies and even personal devices when connected to public university wireless internet service. TikTok is alleged to be operated by the communist Chinese and collects massive amounts of data on those with the app downloaded on their devices – including all images on the device, keystrokes, and other information. By banning social media operations from bad foreign actors, Texas would remove TikTok from the state and prevent similar social media companies from trying to capture data from Texans and negatively exploit the next generation.

**HCR 46:** This resolution urges Congress to enact change to protect minors across the country. Earlier this month, the United States Surgeon General stated the age for social media should be raised. More than 100 organizations, including American Psychological Association Services and Mental Health America, also mirrored this stance in a June 2022 letter to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, stating the mental health crisis is in part due to the harmful content found on social media sites. Just as the Surgeon General warned Americans in 1964 about the harms of cigarettes, now is the time to acknowledge the harms of social media and take significant action to protect children. Congress must act, but even if they do not, Texas will.

“The State of Texas has a vested interest in protecting children and protecting our national security. I applaud Governor Abbott for his leadership against social media companies like TikTok and I look forward to working with him and my colleagues on a legislative solution to this crisis this session.” stated Patterson. “We can’t wait any longer. It’s time to draw a line in the sand and put protecting youth mental health on par with protecting their physical well-being. Social media is the most destructive product teens have legal access to in this country, from causing anxiety and depression or by creating access to dangerous sex and human traffickers.”

Jared Patterson represents House District 106, which encompasses the eastern portion of Denton County. During the 86th & 87th Legislative Sessions, Patterson authored and passed initiatives in policy areas such as transportation, education, property taxes, as well as eliminated unnecessary and burdensome government regulations. Patterson serves on the House Committees on Calendars, Licensing and Administrative Procedures, and Transportation. He also serves on the Texas Cybersecurity Council. His family resides in Frisco.