



Arkansas House Newsletter

August 9, 2024

Safeguarding Children from Online Predators



Recently, the Arkansas State Police (ASP) issued a reminder for parents to remain vigilant in recognizing and preventing online predators from targeting children. This summer alone, ASP has issued several Missing/Endangered Advisories for missing children and teens, including five Amber Alerts since May. Disturbingly, multiple Arkansas teens have been lured away by predators they encountered through online messaging apps.

In our increasingly digital world, it's more important than ever for parents to monitor their children's online activity and educate them on the dangers of the internet. Major Stacie Rhoads, Commander of the ASP Criminal Investigation Division, warns that online predators often attempt to engage children and teens in inappropriate sexual conversations, arrange in-person meetings, or even send explicit materials while requesting images in return.

During the 2023 Regular Session, the General Assembly passed Act 689, which prohibits social media companies from allowing minors in Arkansas to create new accounts without the explicit consent of a parent

or legal guardian. The act requires age verification through a third-party vendor, establishes liability for failing to perform this verification, and outlines penalties for violations. However, enforcement of the act has been delayed due to a legal challenge, which is still pending in the judicial system.

Recently, the governor sent a letter to Arkansas legislators, urging us to continue our efforts to implement meaningful restrictions on children's use of social media platforms.

For resources to help parents protect their children from online predators and technology-facilitated exploitation, visit aricac.org. Schools, civic groups, and other organizations can also request online safety presentations through this site. To report suspicious online activity, contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).