

# **Pa, Youth Mental Health Crisis: Social Media a Key Factor, Parents Urged to Get Involved**

## *New Legislation Limits Phones in Schools, PA Family Support Alliance Offers Resources*

HARRISBURG — The U.S. youth mental health crisis continues to affect Pennsylvania's children, with social media playing a leading role in exacerbating the problem.

“According to the U.S. Surgeon General, about 95% of our youth ages 13 to 17 are on social media platforms and out of that, 1/3 say it's continual use, contributing to depression, anxiety and social isolation,” said Angela Liddle, President and CEO of the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA).

Liddle underscored the effect that social media has had on the mental health of Pennsylvania's children during an appearance on Pennsylvania Newsmakers, a statewide public affairs TV program that begins airing this weekend.

Several state attorneys general and school districts have sued social media companies, alleging they have caused mental health problems for students. Platforms named in the suits include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube. Lawsuits against TikTok have been filed as recently as October 2024.

Pennsylvania legislators took action this summer to give schools the resources necessary to limit student smartphone use during the school day. The legislation, championed by Sen. Ryan Aument (R-Lancaster), amends the School Safety & Mental Health grant program to allow for the purchase of secure, lockable smartphone bags in which students deposit their mobile devices until the end of the school day.

“That's a great first step,” Liddle told host Terry Madonna about the legislation. “We get the screens away from kids during classroom time so that they are engaging with other students and with the teachers, and really focused on learning.”

Recognizing the impact social media has on children, PFSA launched the Family Digital Wellness initiative, an inclusive, supportive, and preventative approach aimed to strengthen families in raising healthy children in a digital era. Family Digital Wellness equips parents, caregivers, and communities with tools to keep Pennsylvania's children safe online. This free resource can be accessed by visiting <https://pafsa.org/family-digital-wellness/>.

“What we want folks to learn is what they model is important for kids,” Liddle said about Family Digital Wellness, adding that parents must also be cognizant of their own screen time. “Look at some parent controls, understand what platforms that your kids are using and understand what the threats really are.”

The 2023 Child Protective Services Report released in August by the Department of Human Services notes that “lack of supervision” was the determined cause for the majority of substantiated near fatalities, with parents continuing to be the most responsible for abuse of their children. The bulk of child fatalities in 2022, Liddle said, were because of a lack of parental supervision.

“In some cases, kids are holed up in their rooms or in the corner of a family room, on their devices, where parents are using it as childcare,” Liddle noted. “The bottom line is that parents need to get in the game.”

“Pennsylvania Newsmakers” is one of the state’s premier politics and public policy television talk shows. The show will air regionally:

- WGAL Channel 8 (Harrisburg and Lancaster) - Sunday, October 27 at 11:30 a.m.
- WBPH (Lehigh Valley and Philadelphia) - Monday, October 28 at 8:30 p.m.
- WLYH (Harrisburg, Lebanon, York) - Monday, October 28 at 8:30 p.m.
- WKBS 47 (Altoona) - Saturday, November 2 at 9:30 a.m.
- WPCB 40 (Pittsburgh) - Saturday, November 2 at 9:30 a.m.
- MeTV (Susquehanna Valley) - Sunday, October 27 at 9:30 a.m.

**CONTACT:** Thom Casey, [tcasey@ceislermedia.com](mailto:tcasey@ceislermedia.com)

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### **About Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance**

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance prevents child abuse and protects children from harm by helping parents learn positive parenting techniques, educating professionals and volunteers who work with children to recognize and report child abuse, and helping community members learn how they can play a positive role in keeping children safe. To learn more about our programs, schedule training, or make a donation, please visit [pafsa.org](http://pafsa.org), or call 800-448-4906.