

Online Safety Bill - Parent Zone Statement - 1 February 2023

## Online Safety Bill faces second reading in the House of Lords

Parent Zone is looking forward to watching the debate on the Online Safety Bill begin in the House of Lords, after it completed its progress through the House of Commons.

Recent changes to the bill have put the protection of young people and children at the heart of this legislation. There is, however, still work to be done to ensure that children are not just safe online, but can flourish.

We are extremely concerned that media literacy has been removed from the bill and believe it is essential that it is put back.

Although we welcomed the Media Literacy Strategy from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – through which we'll be delivering a programme of work in eight local authorities – we view the removal of media literacy from the bill as a missed opportunity. We hope to see it returned in the House of Lords.

We are pleased to see that pornographic content providers will have a duty to protect children from pornographic content.

We are, however, dismayed by the time it has taken to prevent this harm to children and would like the government to commit to bringing this in within six months of the bill's passing. This could be done by allowing Ofcom to research and consult on age assurance tools between now and then.

In the Online Safety Bill, the communications regulator, Ofcom, will oversee the defined 'duty of care' and companies will be required to carry out 'risk assessments'.

As the bill moves to the House of Lords, we would like to see the definition of 'duty of care' expanded. The same safeguarding duties which exist offline should be mirrored in the duty of care online, with moderators for these platforms brought into the community of professionals who have safeguarding training and responsibility.

Vicki Shotbolt, founder and CEO of Parent Zone, commented: *"Parents are becoming increasingly fearful when their children go online. The Online Safety Bill takes us from an unregulated internet to a regulated one, which should help to rebuild trust. It should also create a digital environment that families see as an asset for their children, with the power to equalise opportunity and unlock potential. But that will only happen if we prioritise media literacy and give families the support they need."*

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