



17th November 2022

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP,
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Dear Secretary of State,

We are a coalition of nearly forty civil society organisations which have been working with the government to ensure the Online Safety Bill offers children the highest levels of protection in the digital world. Our group includes bereaved parents who have lost children as a direct result of online harms.

This Bill was scheduled to complete report stage in the Commons before the summer, then again on 1st November and on 8th November. Since then, instead of receiving clear timelines on the progression of the Bill, we have only been provided with vague answers as to when the Bill will return.

In response to a Private Notice Question in the Lords (7th November) raised by Baroness Kidron, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for your Department, Lord Parkinson, replied: "the Secretary of State committed on 20th October to bringing it back to Parliament shortly." Responding to a question at PMQ's (9th November), from the former Minister responsible for the Bill up until October 27th, Damian Collins MP, the Prime Minister answered the Bill would return "in due course." Since then, it has been widely reported that the civil service has formally suggested that the Bill, if further delayed, may fail to pass this session altogether.

Given the promises of ministers - in private, at the dispatch box, and in the Conservative party manifesto - over the last five years, we find these responses inadequate and lacking in transparency. Cynics might suggest that the Government is seeking to run down the clock, either to avoid proper scrutiny or - worse - to kill the Bill altogether. To reassure us that this is not the case, we want to see the Bill brought forward this month, to give the House of Lords enough time to scrutinise it properly before the end of this parliamentary session.

The Bill – and the government's promises to parents, children, bereaved families – are not nice-to-haves. Children's lives, their safety, and their wellbeing hang in the balance. While each incarnation of the government seeks to put its imprint on the Bill, more and more children face a digital world that is not designed with their needs or development in mind. We have witnessed sexual exploitation and abuse at scale and a barrage of content fed to young people that glamourises suicide, starving and self-harm. We have had the landmark conclusion from the senior coroner Andrew Walker that social media contributed to Molly Russell's death in a "more than minimal way", and a resulting Prevention of Future Deaths Report that calls for immediate action. Children cannot wait any longer for government action.

When it was initially proposed, the Online Safety Bill presented an opportunity for the UK to pioneer a world-leading piece of legislation. And in its 2019 manifesto, the government promised to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online. With the passing of the EU's Digital Services Act, the Australian Online Safety Act and upcoming legislation in Canada and Singapore, we are at risk of falling behind instead of setting a global standard. And the government is at risk of failing to deliver on its promise.

We therefore urge you personally to make a public statement confirming the Bill's return to the Commons this month and to the House of Lords in the first week of December.





Child protection is a responsibility not only for government but for all political parties and parliamentarians therefore we have copied this letter to all those who we believe should work together to bring forward the Bill. We are including all political parties in this correspondence and ask that all of you come to a swift agreement to bring this Bill forward now on a cross-party basis.

Sincerely,



5Rights Foundation
NSPCC
Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS)
Barnardo's
Breck Foundation
National Children's Bureau
Anti-Bullying Alliance
British Youth Council
SWGfL
Ditch the Label
Catch22
My Life My Say
Children England
The Diana Award
Include Youth
Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE)
Internet Watch Foundation
Carnegie UK
Clean Up the Internet
Save the Children
The Children's Media Foundation
The Children's Society
Children's Law Centre
SchoolBeat
Parenting NI
Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT UK)
Molly Rose Foundation
The Student View
Childnet
Equality Now
The Lucy Faithfull Foundation
Hacked Off
Coventry Youth Activists
End Violence Against Women
Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford
WAVE Trust
PAPYRUS
NWG