



17<sup>th</sup> 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.



Children’s Charities’ Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS)





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