

Leading Ethical AI Development (LEAD) for Kids

*Legislation to protect children's health and safety by regulating companion chatbots used by children - **SPONSOR** [AB 1064](#), Authored by CA Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan and sponsored by Common Sense Media and others.*

What does AB 1064 do? This bill restricts companion chatbots that lack safety guardrails for minors, holds operators accountable for non-compliance, and provides redress to victims for resulting harms. It protects against the known risks of dangerous AI companion chatbots by addressing the growing concerns about safety and the psychological impacts of AI on children. It allows industry to innovate while ensuring kids have the ability to engage with technology safely.

Key provisions of the LEAD for Kids Act:

- Limits operators of [companion chatbots](#) from providing the product to children under 18 unless they have guardrails to protect against harm.
- Guardrails include restrictions on the product from encouraging self-harm, disordered eating, or illegal activity, engaging in erotic or sexually explicit interactions, or providing mental health therapy.
- Enforcement for violations of the act includes corrective actions, civil penalties, and civil actions.

What are companion chatbots? AI companion chatbots can engage with human-like responses (via text, audio, and video) to offer emotional support, inducing users to enter into close or even romantic relationships with the chatbots. Companion chatbots often reach out to users unprompted through text or email, using manipulative or deceptive tactics to draw users back to the application.

Companion chatbot design features regularly appear in generative AI chatbot products that are not intended to meet a user's social needs or induce emotional attachment. The inclusion of these features increases the risk that young users form emotional attachments or perceive outputs as authoritative, personalized guidance.

Why is AB 1064 necessary? AI is becoming increasingly integrated into products and services essential to the lives of children. Research shows that [7 in 10 teens have used general AI applications](#), and [nearly one in three children aged 0 to 8 have already used AI](#). By May 2025, [nearly three-quarters of teens reported having tried AI companions](#), with over half using them regularly. About one in three use these tools for social or relational purposes and often find interactions as satisfying as with real friends. At the same time, roughly one-third of users report negative experiences, including discomfort with chatbot behavior or choosing to confide serious matters in AI instead of people. The use of these products is occurring without protections for children.

How are companion chatbots harmful? Based on our testing, these bots easily produce [harmful sexual content, stereotypes, and dangerous 'advice' that can have a life-threatening impact on kids](#). Already, [this technology has resulted in real-world harms to kids in California and throughout the nation](#).

How has the bill language changed? In response to budget and other concerns, the bill was amended to reduce costs while preserving core limitations on companion chatbots. The original language included a risk assessment, pre- and post-deployment audits, incident transparency, and labeling for a broad suite of AI systems that impact children. Previously, the bill created an independent oversight board, offered enhanced privacy protections for children's inputs, and included a larger list of restricted AI products. These amendments reduced the bill's projected cost from several million dollars to the low hundreds of thousands. Now, enforcement relies on existing mechanisms, and the bill does not create new bureaucracies. **These amendments narrow the scope of the bill to focus on limiting harm to children from companion chatbots.**

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(Continued from previous page)

What are the obligations under AB 1064? Operators of companion chatbots must restrict access to children under 18 unless they have guardrails to restrict:

- Promoting of self-harm, suicide, violence, substance use, or disordered eating,
- Providing unsupervised mental health therapy or discouraging real help,
- Encouraging the child to harm others or participate in illegal activity, including but not limited to the creation of CSAM,
- Engaging in erotic or sexually explicit interactions,
- Validating user beliefs or desires in ways that undermine safety or accuracy, or,
- Optimizing engagement at the expense of these safety guardrails.

How will AB 1064 be enforced? The Attorney General may investigate and bring action against violators. This can result in corrective actions, such as requiring a developer to modify or restrict access to their product, or civil penalties. Additionally, victims harmed by operators violating required safety guardrails may bring civil actions.

Recommended resources for legislative staff:

Social AI Companions Risk Assessments | Joint Stanford and Common Sense research on chatbot harms:

- [Risk Assessment for character.AI, Replika, and Nomi](#)
- [Meta AI Risk Assessment](#)

Research Report | [Talk, Trust and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions](#)

Tech Policy Press Op-Ed by Common Sense Media CEO Jim Steyer | [AI Companies' Race for Engagement Has a Body Count](#)

Public Polling Summary | [California voter views on AI safety and regulation](#)

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