California Lawmakers Approve First-in-the-Nation Social Media Health Warning Bill

California is on the verge of becoming the second state in the nation to require health warnings on social media platforms, following Minnesota's lead earlier this summer. Lawmakers in Sacramento voted Friday to pass a measure that would mandate warnings for young users about the risks of excessive social media use, sending the bill to Gov. Gavin Newsom's desk for final approval.

The legislation, authored by Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (D–Orinda), comes amid growing national concern about the impact of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat on children's mental health. The proposal requires social media companies to display warnings to minors drawn from a 2023 U.S. surgeon general's report, which found that prolonged use "can have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents."

If enacted, platforms would need to show a warning message for 10 seconds each time a minor logs in and issue longer, unskippable alerts after extended use. Specifically, a 30-second warning would appear once a user exceeds three hours in a single day, repeating every additional hour spent online.

"This is about addressing a global mental health crisis," Bauer-Kahan said after the vote. "The crisis is real, urgent, and getting worse."

The movement for warning labels gained momentum last year after U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called for strong safeguards against the addictive designs of social media, likening their influence to tobacco. His call to action has since been endorsed by 42 state attorneys general, including California's Rob Bonta.

Still, the measure is expected to face fierce opposition from the tech industry. Trade groups representing giants such as Meta, Google, and Amazon argue the law could violate First Amendment protections by restricting access to information and expression for young people. They have previously succeeded in blocking similar California efforts to regulate social media.

The bill, AB 56, passed largely along party lines with Democratic support. Newsom has until October 13 to sign or veto the legislation, a decision that could once again test the state's fraught relationship with Silicon Valley over online safety and regulation.

If approved, California would become a national test case for whether mandatory warnings can meaningfully curb the psychological toll of social media on children — or whether courts will once again step in to limit the state’s efforts.