

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 6

WHEREAS, over the past decade, the mental health of children and adolescents in the United States and in New Jersey has experienced a significant and well-documented decline, marked by increased rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation; and

WHEREAS, the timing of this decline in children's mental health coincides with the widespread adoption of smartphones and the rapid growth of internet-based platforms and social media and the proliferation of artificial intelligence technology, which have fundamentally altered how children communicate, learn, and socialize; and

WHEREAS, a growing body of research suggests that excessive or unregulated use of social media and other online platforms may contribute negatively to mental health; and

WHEREAS, children's online experiences are increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems and digital design choices that prioritize engagement over well-being, often without sufficient safeguards appropriate to children's developmental needs; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey has a compelling interest in protecting the health, safety, and welfare of its children and in ensuring that State policies, programs, and services reflect emerging evidence regarding the impacts of technology on child development and mental health; and

WHEREAS, this Administration will prioritize a number of measures to protect the health, safety, and welfare of children in online spaces; and

WHEREAS, multiple departments, offices, divisions, and agencies of the State of New Jersey administer programs, services, and regulatory responsibilities that directly or indirectly affect children's mental health, education, healthcare, and online safety; and

WHEREAS, a coordinated, whole-of-government approach is necessary to identify opportunities for the State to improve children's mental health outcomes in the context of internet and social media use;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MIKIE SHERRILL, Governor of the State of New Jersey, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and by the Statutes of this State, do hereby ORDER and DIRECT:

1. Priority Focus on Children's Mental Health and Digital Environments. All Executive Branch departments, offices, divisions, and agencies of the State of New Jersey shall, in executing any duties related to or addressing the interaction of children with technology platforms, and to the extent permitted by law, prioritize children's mental health outcomes as they relate to the use of technology, the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms.

2. Interagency Collaboration. The Chief Operating Officer for the State of New Jersey shall facilitate coordination across all Executive Branch departments and agencies with jurisdiction over matters pertaining to children's mental health and online safety to ensure interagency collaboration and policy coordination.

3. Scope of Review and Identification of Strategies. Such Executive Branch departments and agencies shall, within the scope of their respective authorities, and to the extent not inconsistent with any statute, regulation, or other legal mandate, review existing policies, programs, data collection efforts, and regulatory frameworks to identify opportunities to:

- a. promote healthy and age-appropriate internet and social media use;

- b. prevent and mitigate harms such as cyberbullying, deepfakes, online exploitation, and exposure to harmful or addictive content;
- c. support parents, caregivers, educators, and healthcare providers in understanding and addressing the mental health impacts of online activity;
- d. encourage and provide to schools and parents evidence-based digital well-being practices for children and adolescents; and
- e. identify gaps in services, protections, or coordination related to children's online experiences and mental health.

4. **Stakeholder Engagement.** In carrying out this directive, Executive Branch departments and agencies shall engage in ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders, including mental health professionals, educators, parents, youth advocates, researchers, and, where appropriate and with parental consent, children and adolescents themselves, to inform the identification of effective and practical strategies.

5. **Office of Youth Online Mental Health Safety and Awareness and higher education research center.** There is established within the Department of Health an Office of Youth Online Mental Health Safety and Awareness (the Office), which shall work in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Operating Officer and the Executive Branch departments and agencies subject to this Order. The Office shall collect and analyze the data, information, and recommendations generated by the departments and agencies subject to this Order to develop and refine recommendations for actions the State or its instrumentalities can take to guide youth in the responsible use of online and social media platforms. After the establishment of a research center at a state institute of

higher education focused on the relationship between digital technology and children's mental health and wellbeing, which this Administration intends to pursue, the Office will discharge its functions in close coordination and collaboration with the research center.

6. **Construction and Implementation.** Nothing in this Order shall be construed to alter or limit any statutory authority of any Executive Branch department or agency, nor to require the disclosure of information that is confidential, privileged, or protected from disclosure by law. This Order shall be implemented in a manner consistent with all applicable State and federal law.

7. **Definition.** For purposes of this Order, "Executive branch departments and agencies" shall mean any of the principal departments in the Executive Branch of State government and any agency, authority, board, bureau, commission, division, institution, office, or other instrumentality within or created by any such department, and any independent State authority, commission, instrumentality, or agency under which the Governor exercises executive authority, as determined by the Attorney General.

8. This Order shall take effect immediately.

GIVEN, under my hand and seal this
20th day of January,
Two Thousand and Twenty-Six,
and of the Independence of
the United States, the Two
Hundred and Fiftieth.

[seal]

/s/ Mikie Sherrill

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Timothy P. Lydon

Chief Counsel to the Governor