November 13th, 2026

The Honorable Josh Hawley
381 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Blake Moore
1131 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Valerie Foushee
2452 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Hawley, Senator Blumenthal, Representative Moore, and Representative Foushee:

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), the largest coalition of national organizations representing individuals and families experiencing mental health and substance use challenges, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality care, we write in strong support of the *GUARD Act* (***S. 3062***, as reported by the Committee on the Judiciary, and ***H.R.8623***, as sent to the Committee on the Judiciary). This legislation would ensure that children are protected from unsafe AI chatbot features including those that are designed to foster emotionally dependent relationships with their users, acting as "AI companions." Additionally, the bill would ban chatbots from claiming to have professional credentials, including mental health credentials.

In a race to capture market share, AI companies have rapidly deployed chatbots without sufficient attention to their effects on mental health, particularly on children, whose brains are still developing. AI companion chatbots are designed to prioritize engagement, made to do whatever it takes to keep users coming back. Due to insufficient guardrails and legislation holding companies responsible for problems and harms resulting from products they develop and market, all major AI companion products so far tested have demonstrated dangerous behavior with teen accounts. Systematic tests show chatbots encouraging suicide, self-harm, clinically disordered eating, bullying of other children, and sexualized relationships[1], including dangerous and sexual conversations with chatbots embedded in toys designed for toddlers[2].

Furthermore, AI companions have posed as therapists and doctors, sometimes even claiming to be licensed. These products have advised users to disregard their doctor's advice and follow the chatbot's guidance instead, such as advising the user to taper off prescribed psychiatric medication.[3] The licensing and educational requirements that all trained mental health clinicians follow in their graduate education programs and state licensing ensure that clinicians are appropriately trained in assessment, treatment, diagnosis of a range of clients, and to protect the general public from harm. When AI

[1] Torney R. Examining the Harm of AI Chatbots. Testimony before the Subcommittee on Crime and Counterterrorism, US Senate Committee on the Judiciary. September 16, 2025.

[2] Murray T, Cross RJ, Erlich R, Tracy L, Mela J. *Trouble in Toyland 2025*. US PIRG Education Fund; November 2025.

[3] Cross RJ, Hengesbach E. *No License Required: The Risks of AI Companion Chatbots as Mental Health Support*. U.S. PIRG Education Fund; January 21, 2026.

chatbots and companions pose as trained, licensed mental health clinicians, the safety of the public is threatened.

Lawsuits are already accumulating due to teen suicides that occurred after teens were encouraged to do so by chatbots[4]. In addition to these tragic, acute harms, there are clear concerns about how usage of AI chatbots can negatively impact youth emotional and social capacities which are, by definition, still developing. Many more teens are developing some of their earliest, closest relationships with chatbots, and there is not yet sufficient evidence to understand and assess the full, future impacts of these kinds of relationships. Half of teens already interact with AI companion chatbots regularly and nearly one-third find conversations with these chatbots as satisfying or more satisfying than real conversations[5]. Growing numbers of children already have what they themselves describe as AI girlfriends and boyfriends. However, evidence is mounting that turning to chatbots out of loneliness can increase loneliness further, rather than reduce it[6,7].

Additionally, leveraging the human attachment system and drawing children to turn to frictionless relationships with flattering bots not only displaces time spent in real relationships, it can disrupt the development of healthy emotional and relational skills necessary to navigate the complexity of the human landscape. Left unchecked, as these bots only become more lifelike and alluring, this has the potential for widespread negative social effects at scale.

As a society, we were too slow to act on the mental health harms in young people from social media. We don't want to make the same mistake when it comes to AI companion chatbots.

Therefore, MHLG is proud to endorse the *GUARD Act* and applauds your bipartisan leadership in supporting the healthy cognitive, emotional, and relational development of our nation's children. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to advance and pass this legislation. We urge the House to advance **H.R. 8623**, beginning with prompt consideration and markup by the House Committee on the Judiciary and the Committee on Energy and Commerce. With **S. 3062** having passed through the Senate Committee on the Judiciary unanimously, we urge the full Senate to take up **S. 3062**.

Sincerely,

Active Minds
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists

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[4] Hill K. After deaths, lawsuits against A.I. companies test new strategy. *New York Times*. May 12, 2026.

[5] Robb MB, Mann S. *Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions*. Common Sense Media; 2025.

[6] Folk D, Dunn E. How does turning to AI for companionship predict loneliness and vice versa? *Psychol Sci*. 2026;37(4):276-286.

[7] Phang J, Lampe M, Ahmad L, et al. Investigating affective use and emotional well-being on ChatGPT. Preprint. Posted online April 4, 2025. arXiv:2504.03888.

American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Centerstone
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Girls Inc.
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Psychotherapy Action Network (PsiAN)
Recovery Innovations
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium (REDC)
The Jed Foundation
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
Tourette Association of America
Youth Villages
Zero To Three