

October 24, 2025

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Ranking Member Pallone:

We, the undersigned advocates dedicated to protecting children from online harms, write in support of the bipartisan App Store Freedom Act, co-sponsored by Reps. Kat Cammack (R-FL) and Lori Trahan (D-MA).<sup>1</sup> The legislation would promote online child safety by bringing much-needed competition in app stores, enabling alternative stores that cater specifically to the needs of parents and children.

Apple and Google falsely claim that more competition would increase harms to children. The exact opposite is true, as we explain below. Furthermore, the App Store Freedom Act would complement and enhance the effectiveness of other online safety bills under consideration by the House Energy and Commerce Committee—and nothing in the legislation would alter or disrupt the controls that Google and Apple offer parents today.

For more than a decade, Apple and Google have monopolized the mobile app ecosystem through the App Store and Play Store.<sup>2</sup> Without meaningful competition, these firms have continually failed to protect children from sexual exploitation, exposure to obscenity, abuse of their data, and more. In parallel, Apple and Google have fought to prevent competition under the premise that their monopolies are safe for children.<sup>3</sup> The argument is not only cynical—it is belied by these tech giants' own terrible track record on safety and privacy.

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<sup>1</sup> The App Store Freedom Act, H.R. 3209, 119th Cong. (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/3209>.

<sup>2</sup> Josh Howarth, *iPhone vs. Android User Stats*, EXPLODING TOPICS (Apr. 24, 2025), <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/iphone-android-users>.

<sup>3</sup> Compare APPLE, *Maintaining a Safe App Store Experience* (last visited Oct. 15, 2025), <https://support.apple.com/en-us/122712> and Digital Child Institute, Request by Child Safety Advocates for the FTC to Investigate Apple's Deceptive and Unfair App Store Practices, Violations of COPPA, and the 2014 FTC Consent Decree, Fed. Trade Comm'n (2025) ("The Supreme Court described a company in Apple's position as a 'bottleneck monopolist or monopsonist,' which applies to Apple due to its monopoly power over how app developers sell their product through its store. Given the size of Apple's app marketplace, even seemingly small deceptive claims or unfair practices can cause serious harm to children. As detailed throughout this complaint, Apple's violations are significant."), [https://www.digitalchildhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/FTC-Complaint-Against-Apple\\_25.pdf](https://www.digitalchildhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/FTC-Complaint-Against-Apple_25.pdf).

A recent complaint filed by child safety advocates to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) underscores how Apple knowingly marketed unsafe products to children, falsely represented the efficacy of its vetting measures and parental controls, entered into exploitative contracts with minors, and potentially violated the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act and a 2014 FTC consent decree.<sup>4</sup>

Prior investigations have similarly concluded that Apple’s App Store is a “mass distributor of risky and inappropriate apps to children.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, one of Apple’s own engineers called Apple “the greatest platform for distributing child porn” and that “child predator grooming” was an “under-resourced challenge.”<sup>6</sup> For example, Apple’s review process failed to detect “nudify apps” that enabled users to create non-consensual sexual imagery.<sup>7</sup> And only after mounting public pressure did the company take action and remove the apps from the App Store.<sup>8</sup>

Google also has a troubling history when it comes to protecting children’s safety in Google Play. In 2018, a security firm found Google admitted 60 games in its app store dubbed “AdultSwine” that displayed pornographic ads while children played them.<sup>9</sup> These apps were downloaded millions of times before being removed. A separate investigation led by consumer advocates found that apps in the “Family” section of the Google Play Store violated children’s privacy law, exposed children to inappropriate content, and manipulated kids into making in-app purchases.<sup>10</sup> More recently, a 2023 report found that Google recommended adult apps to minors, including apps with the names “3Fun: Threesomes Couples Dating” and “Chatous: 18+ Live Video Chat.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> HEAT INITIATIVE & PARENTS TOGETHER ACTION, *ROTTEN RATINGS: 24 HOURS IN APPLE’S APP STORE 1* (2024), [https://heatinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Apple-App-Store-Report-18-dec-12\\_09.pdf](https://heatinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Apple-App-Store-Report-18-dec-12_09.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Statement by Eric Friedman, Conversation between Eric Friedman & Herve Sibert, iMESSAGE (Feb. 14, 2020), (“The spotlight at Facebook etc is all on trust and safety (fake accounts, etc). In privacy, the suck. Our priorities are the inverse. Which is why we are the greatest platform for distributing child porn, etc.”), (<https://embed.documentcloud.org/documents/21044004-2020-february-fear-friedman-admits-in-feb-2020-that-app-store-greatest-platform-for-child-porn-predator-grooming/#document/p11>)

<sup>7</sup> John Tuason, *Apple Removed Nudifying Apps but Continues to Host and Enable Child Sexual Abuse*, NATIONAL CENTER ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (July 18, 2024), <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/apple-removed-nudifying-apps-but-continues-to-host-and-enable-child-sexual-abuse/>.

<sup>8</sup> Emanuel Maiberg, *Apple Removes Nonconsensual AI Nude Apps Following 404 Media Investigation*, 404 MEDIA (Apr. 26, 2024), <https://www.404media.co/apple-removes-nonconsensual-ai-nude-apps-following-404-media-investigation/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Google Removes Gaming Apps with Pop-Up Porn Malware*, REUTERS (Jan. 12, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/google-removes-gaming-apps-with-pop-up-porn-malware-idUSKBN1F129N>

<sup>10</sup> Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood et al., *Request to Investigate Google’s Unfair and Deceptive Practices in Marketing Apps for Children*, Fed. Trade Comm’n (2018), [https://fairplayforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/archive/devel-generate/vad/google\\_ftc\\_complaint.pdf](https://fairplayforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/archive/devel-generate/vad/google_ftc_complaint.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> CANADIAN CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION, *REVIEWING THE ENFORCEMENT OF APP AGE RATINGS IN APPLE’S APP STORE AND GOOGLE PLAY* (2022), <https://protectchildren.ca/en/resources-research/app-age-ratings-report>.

If these companies faced meaningful competition, the market would punish them for their failures and incentivize them to take children's safety seriously. But these firms control the software of more than 99% of American smartphones, and they erect needless barriers to developers looking to distribute their mobile apps through alternative channels. Worse, Google and Apple often profit from downloads and in-app purchases of apps that are unsafe for children, further disincentivizing the firms from taking protective action.

The bipartisan App Store Freedom Act would enable much-needed alternatives to flourish, including app stores that actually live up to the standards that Google and Apple claim to uphold. Importantly, this legislation would allow parents to delete or hide the Google Play Store or Apple App Stores from their children's phones and designate a different app store the default.<sup>12</sup> This would empower parents, for instance, to ensure their children are only accessing app stores that include safe and educational content.

Google and Apple have spent years fighting any attempt to open their app stores to competition while cynically and falsely claiming that those monopolies are safe for children. The evidence shows overwhelmingly that these firms have not only failed to protect children, but that their monopolies have exacerbated and amplified digital harms to kids. It is essential that Congress pry open these walled gardens and enable a race to the top for app stores that fulfill the needs of parents and their children. The App Store Freedom Act would do just that.

We urge the Committee to advance this critical legislation as part of its efforts to protect children from online harm.

Signed,

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President  
Digital Progress Institute

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Chief Executive Officer  
Citizens for Renewing America

Terry Schilling  
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<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 1.

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