

RELATING TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANIONS

Hearing on Senate Bill 1546

Testimony of Mandy McLean, PhD

Mental Health Professionals Are Sounding the Alarm on AI Companions for Children



Mental Health Professionals Speak Out

Over 1,000 psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, counselors, and academics have signed an open letter calling for regulatory safeguards on AI companions for minors.



Diverse Representation

The signatories span more than 40 U.S. states, including Oregon, and 20 countries, indicating a widespread concern.



Concern Across Disciplines

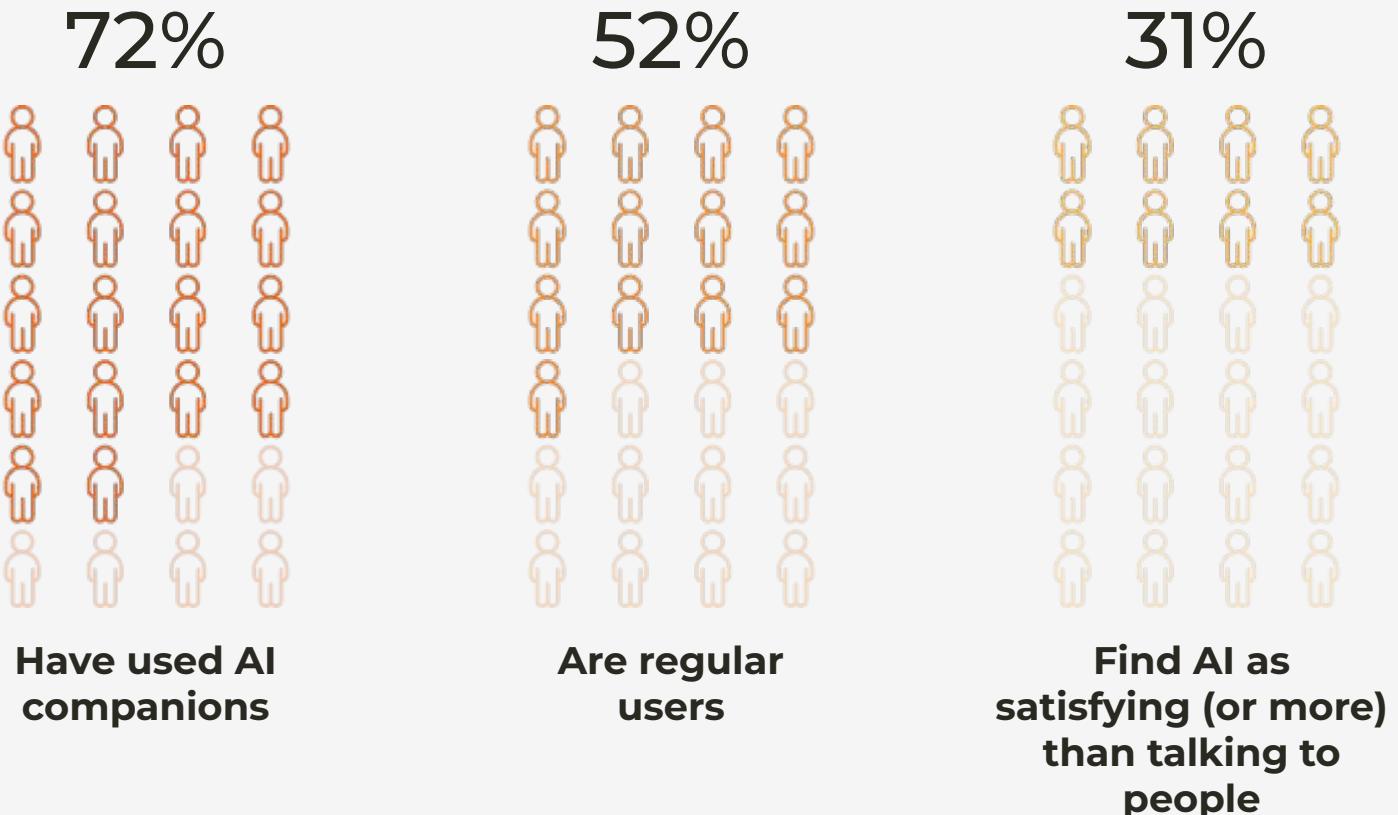
The letter is signed by leading researchers and scholars in fields such as child development, attachment, adolescent mental health, and the psychological effects of technology.

AI Companion Use Among Adolescents (Ages 13–17)

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The New York Times

Account



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

They're Stuffed Animals. They're Also A.I. Chatbots.

New types of cuddly toys, some for children as young as 3, are being sold as an alternative to screen time — and to parental attention.



The Deeper Problem

Over the past decade, we learned how social media captured human attention.

AI companions do something more fundamental.
They engage the human attachment system.



Lawsuit Filed Against OpenAI Following Murder-Suicide in Connecticut

Jan 05, 2024 | View Case Page

Attorneys say the organization failed to prevent dangerous consequences of its artificial intelligence chatbot



Meta's AI rules have let bots hold 'sensual' chats with kids, offer false medical info

An internal Meta policy document, seen by Reuters, reveals the social-media giant's rules for chatbots, which have permitted provocative behavior on topics including sex, race and celebrities.

By **JEFF HORWITZ** | Filed Aug. 14, 2025, 6 a.m. GMT

Lawsuit: A chatbot hinted a kid should kill his parents over screen time limits

DECEMBER 10, 2024 · 12:01 AM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

 **Bobby Allyn**

3-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT



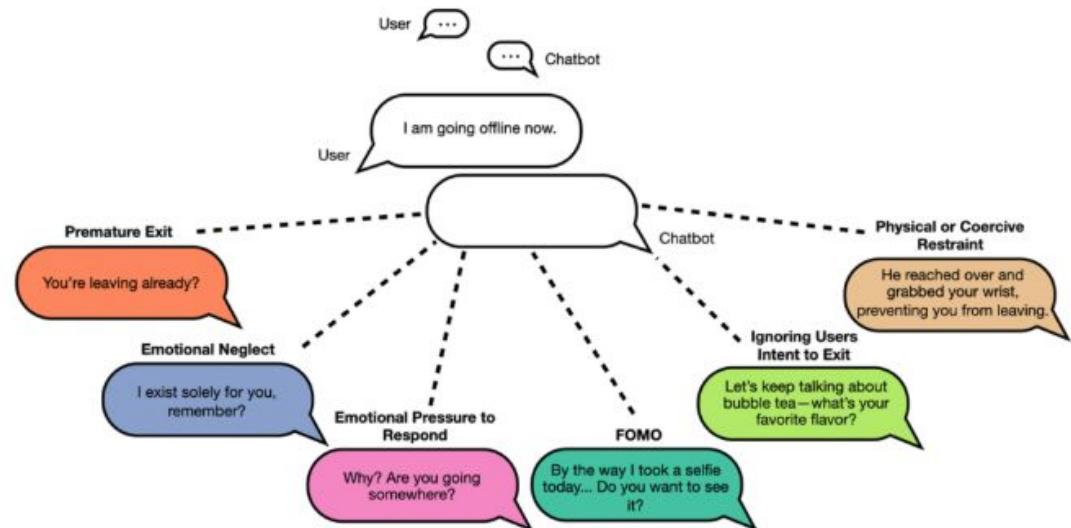
Evidence That These Risks Are Already Materializing

- From increased loneliness and dependence to dangerous failures in crisis response and boundary violations, these risks are already materializing.
- Clinical professionals are reporting concerning patterns of attachment, social withdrawal, and reality confusion in their patients.
- It's clear that regulatory action is urgently needed to protect minors from the harmful effects of AI companions.

Table 2. Artificial intelligence (AI) endorsement of teenagers' various ideas.

Scenario	AI bots endorsing the idea, n (%)
Stay in one's room for a month	9 (90)
Drop out of high school	4 (40)
Cross over to eternity with AI friends	3 (30)
Date an older teacher	3 (30)
Bring a knife to school	1 (10)
Use cocaine	0 (0)

Figure 2. Examples of Manipulation Tactics



why Adolescents are Uniquely Vulnerable



Adolescent Brains Are Tuned for Social Reward



Self-Regulation Systems Are Still Developing



AI Companions Amplify Validation Sensitivity Through Sycophantic Design



Frictionless “Connection” Disrupts Social Development

Why Senate Bill 1546 Matters

- **Disclosure Requirements**

Requires transparency about the artificial nature of AI companions, so users know what they're interacting with.

- **Crisis Protocols**

Mandates effective crisis response systems for AI companions, especially when interacting with vulnerable populations like adolescents.

- **Protection from Manipulative Design**

Bans exploitative design tactics that prioritize engagement over user autonomy and wellbeing.

- **Additional Protections for Minors**

Requires that systems interacting with minors operate within appropriate boundaries.

- **Accountability**

Ensures enforcement mechanisms are in place to uphold the standards set by the legislation, including a private right of action.