



14 December 2017

EU Commissioner, Mariya Gabriel,
European Commission
DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Communication, Access
to Documents and Document Management Unit A1
BREY 07/045
B - 1049 Brussels (Belgium)

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing to you to highlight the growing serious issue of internet safety for children that is now a world-wide issue which requires political leadership to improve the situation. As we now know, internet safety is getting more and more difficult to manage and it is of paramount importance that the European Union makes efforts to regulate or legislate to address this issue.

I wish to make particular reference to the setting up of fake social media profiles on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram etc. and also to allowing minors to open accounts on social media platforms without age verification. As you will be acutely aware this is an ongoing concern worldwide and I would like to see the EU Commission taking strong action. These fake online accounts present a danger to all European Citizens as they are used to exploit those most vulnerable in our society. Children who use these platforms cannot escape the dark side of the world wide web as they continue to ping even as they try to sleep at night, there is no escaping the online bully. The obvious answer is of course children should not be on these platforms, but they are, because we allow them to be.

I urge you Commissioner to consider a new policy that will require multinationals such as Facebook to introduce new and stronger methods of authenticating accounts created on their platforms. At present, a name, date of birth and email address is all that is required to set up an online profile. The ease of access to setting up such profiles is extremely worrying and more needs to be done in order to ensure that accounts that are created are done so by real people and are the required age to open such an account. One such method I would encourage would be the introduction of a cross check with a social security number as per the Irish public service card which would confirm a person's date of birth, or passport number in order to create an account. This would not limit to people creating multiple profiles, rather it would clearly create a link between all online accounts that person may have.



In order to establish such an initiative I believe a strong stance needs to be taken at European level. It is imperative that an initiative such as outlined in the above begins at European level as individual countries like Ireland do not have the leverage over the large multi-national corporations to force change. I do not want to restrict EU citizens access to the internet but rather place more emphasis on multinational corporations to take more responsibility in being proactive with offering a secure service and to safe guard our children.

As representatives it is our duty to protect the most vulnerable in our society but also it is our duty to provide legislation that will in the future protect those we represent. I will endeavour to champion the causes of internet safety in Ireland but as you will agree, is a European wide issue that I believe can be easily improved with new legislation.

At a recent Oireachtas committee meeting I attended in relation to this matter the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) stated online safety was "the single greatest threat to children in our time" I agree with them, we need to act now.

I look forward to your reply,

Sincerely,

Jim Daly T.D.
Minister for Mental Health and Older People