



**Written Testimony of Emma Lembke,  
Founder and Executive Director of the LOG OFF Movement**

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary: Protecting Our Children Online

February 14, 2023

My name is Emma Lembke. I am originally from Birmingham, Alabama. I am currently a college sophomore studying Political Science at Washington University in St. Louis. I am honored and humbled to be here today.

I created my first social media account on Instagram when I was 12. I was in 6th grade and I was the last in my friend group allowed on social media platforms. At the time, I distinctly remember watching these apps pull my friends' attention away from games of tag and down, towards their screens. To 12-year-old me, these platforms almost seemed magical; tools that could deepen society's connective, expressive, and exploratory capabilities.

It felt as though I, a girl from Birmingham, Alabama, had the world at my fingertips, but as I began to spend more time on these platforms, I was met with a harsh reality. Social media was not magic. It was an illusion, a carefully designed product predicated on maximizing my attention at the cost of my well-being.

As my screen time steadily increased, my mental and physical health suffered. The constant quantification of my worth through likes, comments, and followers increased my anxiety and deepened my depression. As a young woman, being exposed to unrealistic body standards and harmful recommended content severely damaged my sense of self and led me towards disordered eating. I became the living embodiment of [Facebook's own 2019 internal research finding](#) that their platforms made body image issues worse for one in three teen girls.

No matter the harm I incurred, addictive features like the endless scroll and autoplay pulled me back into the online world where I continued to suffer. And there, I remained for over three years, scrolling mindlessly for 5-6 hours a day. I eventually reached a personal breaking point in the 9th grade that caused me to temporarily remove social media apps

from my device. I am still recovering today from the damage caused by social media and hyper aware that many of its effects are long lasting, if not permanent.

Senators, my story does not exist in isolation– it is a story representative of my generation, Generation Z. As the first digital natives, we grew up alongside technology. We have never known a world without the internet. Every answer has been a Google search away, every moment captured on Facebook or Instagram.

To be clear, social media can enhance our connective, expressive, and exploratory capabilities, but we are only just beginning to understand the consequences associated with growing up online. Yet, it is from our lived experience as Generation Z - the generation most harmed - that we can begin to build the most promising solutions. Decision makers from other generations must hear from us to fully understand the challenges and opportunities associated with being a young person in the digital world. It is only when young people are given a space at the table that effective solutions can emerge and safer online spaces can be created. The power of youth voices in the space is far too great to continue to be ignored.

This is why, as a senior in high school, after years of researching and reflecting on my own relationship with social media, I founded the LOG OFF Movement. I knew a community had to be created by young people for young people to tackle the complexities of social media and its impact on younger generations.

Through LOG OFF, I have engaged with youth around the world who have shared their experiences of harm with me. I've listened to stories of unwanted direct messages, vicious cyberbullying, and dangerous pro-anorexia rabbit holes. While our stories may differ, as young people we share the frustration of being portrayed as passive victims of Big Tech when in reality, we are ready to be included as active agents of change; rebuilding new, and safer online spaces for the next generation. Ten years from now social media will not be what it is today, it will be what people of my generation build it to be. We want to build it differently, we want to build it right.

I came here today as the representative for those young changemakers. To be the voice not just of those of my generation who have been harmed or who are currently struggling, but as a voice for all the 12-year-old girls yet to come. The genie is out of the bottle, and screen time across younger generations is only increasing, with [the number of US teenagers](#)

[online continuously almost doubling from 2015 to 2018: 24% to 45%. In 2020, 81% of 14 to 22-year-olds said they used social media either “daily” or “almost constantly.”](#)

As a society, we will never go back to a time where social media does not exist, nor should we. But make no mistake, unregulated social media is a weapon of mass destruction that continues to jeopardize the privacy, safety, and wellbeing of all American youth. This harm does not stop at the borders of the United States, this is a global crisis. The United States has a unique opportunity to lead the world in putting a stop to predatory and targeted actions by Big Tech against the world’s most vulnerable.

It’s time to act and, Senators, I urge you to meaningfully regulate these companies not just *for* my generation but *with* my generation. Integrating our lived experience into the regulatory process is essential to getting it right.

Thank you for having me here today. I look forward to answering your questions.