



Age Verification Providers Association

Rt. Hon. Nadine Dorries MP  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
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Dear Secretary of State,

**Online Safety Bill: Meeting expectations on age verification for online pornography**

As the trade association for suppliers of online age assurance technology, we were obviously delighted to hear you re-affirm the Government's commitment to amend the draft Online Safety Bill to ensure that all forms of online pornography fall within scope of a new duty of care.

If you do not already intend to do so, we would like to encourage you to include this form of harm on the face of the Bill itself. There seems little doubt it would otherwise be later listed as harmful content in secondary legislation, but as implied by this weekend's announcement that other communication offenses needed to be included in the law now so that Ofcom could take enforcement action faster, that process would delay any real regulatory impact on pornographic content very significantly. By putting pornography into the primary legislation, Ofcom will be able immediately to issue their call for evidence after Royal Assent, draft and consult on a risk assessment and code of conduct swiftly thereafter, and secure your approval and that of Parliament in as little as six months after the Bill becomes law. We have seen in France that a major site can then be forced by the regulator to comply in as little as 15 days.

If left to secondary legislation, our fear is the debate on which other harms should be listed, and then the process of approving that schedule, could delay enforcement for two years or more, and will inevitably fail to meet the high expectations of the public which will be set by Parliament's approval of this world-leading legislation: An initiative which will, we should also highlight, keep the UK SafetyTech industry in the vanguard of age assurance globally, by recognising, in statute, privacy-protecting, rights-protecting, standards-based, certified, independent third-party age assurance.

And one final suggestion would be to consider further the enforcement process – there are over 1.3 million adult websites, most of which will need to be compelled to comply with age verification. It is not practical to ask Ofcom to seek a court order in each case before blocking access to payments and other critical services. Hundreds of new sites are published every day. We would not wish to undermine the safeguards a judicial process creates – but perhaps that would come through an appeals process instead of such a laborious need for court orders.

Yours sincerely,

*Iain Corby*  
**Executive Director**  
**Age Verification Providers Association**