SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION



NATIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA LITIGATION TEAM

OUR YOUTH ARE FACING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS CAUSED BY SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

Our nation's youth have become addicted to social media, resulting in a major mental health crisis.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Social media companies like Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Tik Tok, Snapchat and YouTube/Google.

Everything about these products—from inadequate age verification measures, insufficient parental controls, endless scrolling, constant notifications, and targeted algorithms—have been designed to addict teen and adolescent users.

These companies are fueled by their own greed and have put profits over the safety of our youth.

As a result, children across the country are suffering mental and physical harms.

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NATIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA LITIGATION TEAM

This consortium was formed to work jointly on behalf of public entities in the investigation and prosecution of claims for damages arising out of negligence, public nuisance and other claims against social media companies like Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Tik Tok, Snapchat and YouTube/Google.

We are leaders in representing public entities in this type of litigation against major companies. Our law firms previously created the National JUUL Consortium, which collectively represented over 300 school districts and public entities that serve over 5 million students in litigation against the e-cigarette giant. We helped secure a substantial settlement agreement with JUUL that provides school districts across the country with meaningful compensation. We are now working with school districts and other government entities to hold social media companies accountable for the harms they've caused.

All the firms in our legal team are nationally recognized firms that have built a reputation on their ability and willingness to litigate complex disputes against some of the world's largest companies.

Large cases and powerful defendants are nothing new to us. We have fought and won cases against giants such as BP, Bayer, Volkswagen and Johnson & Johnson to name just a few.

We are committed to representing public entities, large and small, across the country. We will work to obtain just compensation for the mental health crisis and the costs imposed on public entities by irresponsible social media companies.

Members of our Consortium currently serve in key social media litigation leadership roles, including Co-Lead of the Judicial Council Coordination Proceedings (JCCP) in California state court, Plaintiffs' Steering Committee in the JCCP, and Plaintiffs' Leadership Committee in the Social Media Addiction/ Personal Injury Product Liability multidistrict litigation (MDL) in federal court.

Together, our team will work with school districts across the nation as they seek to hold social media companies accountable for creating a youth mental health crisis caused by social media addiction.

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LAW FIRM

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TRIAL LAWYERS

Wagstaff & Cartmell

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IT'S TIME THESE SOCIAL MEDIA GIANTS ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR FAILING TO PROTECT OUR YOUNG, VULNERABLE AND AT-RISK CHILDREN

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Social media companies like Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Tik Tok, Snapchat and YouTube/Google knowingly put young users in harm's way to generate billions of dollars in profit.

They adopted targeted algorithms to collect adolescent users' data unethically; used addictive psychological tactics to increase adolescent and teen usage; and feature inefficient controls to help parents exercise their rights and duties to monitor and limit their children's use.

As a result, our children are becoming addicted to social media, resulting in mental and physical injuries like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, body dysmorphia, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and even death.

TARGETED ALGORITHMS

Meta, Snap, TikTok and YouTube/ Google are considered to be some of the largest information technology companies in the world.

Meta, for example, generated $69.7 billion from advertising in 2019, more than 98% of its total revenue for the year.[1] In other words, Meta makes billions of dollars marketing its adolescent user base—along with detailed data on their likes and interests—to advertisers to increase its profits.

These companies use advanced computer rules and processes to collect and analyze users' data. This information is used to assemble virtual files on their users, covering hundreds if not thousands of user-specific data segments. This allows advertisers to tailor advertising and designate advertising dollars to very specific categories of adolescent users.

Many of these data segments are collected by social media companies, scrutinizing each adolescent user's activity on and off the products. Youth users are not even aware of such behavioral surveillance, like navigation paths, watch time and hover time.

The larger a social media product's user database grows, the more time users spend on the database. The more detailed information the product can extract from its users, the more money it makes.

[1] https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/30/tech/facebook-ad-business-boycott/index.html

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DESIGNED TO BE ADDICTIVE

Today's adolescents are the first generation of consumers to have grown up primarily in the digital era. They have come of age alongside social media products and massive tech companies.

According to the Pew Research Center, 92% of U.S. teens are active on social media,[2] with Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat and YouTube/Google dominating. The research found that nearly half the teens surveyed (46%) said they are online "almost constantly"[3] and 62% of 13- to 18-year-olds use social media daily.[4]

Products like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube use email, text alerts and push notifications to inform users when they receive "likes" or "mentions." When someone posts on social media and receives positive feedback, the brain releases dopamine, the body's "feel-good" hormone, rewarding the behavior.[5] These products also contain addictive algorithms that are meticulously designed to hook adolescent users into a cycle of habitual use.

A similar brain conditioning occurs with addictive drugs. Like alcohol or drugs, people can become addicted to social media.

FAILURE TO PROTECT

These social media companies use ineffective age verification measures, easily allowing children to access their products. Parents are essentially defenseless against the tactics of these companies. These products have features that prevent parents from monitoring and limiting children's use.

In April 2021, former Facebook employee Frances Haugen revealed that the company had detailed knowledge of its negative impact on young users' mental health. Facebook and Instagram hid information from the public, driving teens' interest in their products to increase their profit and refusing to take steps to prevent harm.

[2] https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/mental-health-minute/social-media-and-adolescent-mental-health/
[3] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/
[4] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/8-18-census-integrated-report-final-web_0.pdf
[5] https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time/

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The Surgeon General's Report on Social Media and Youth

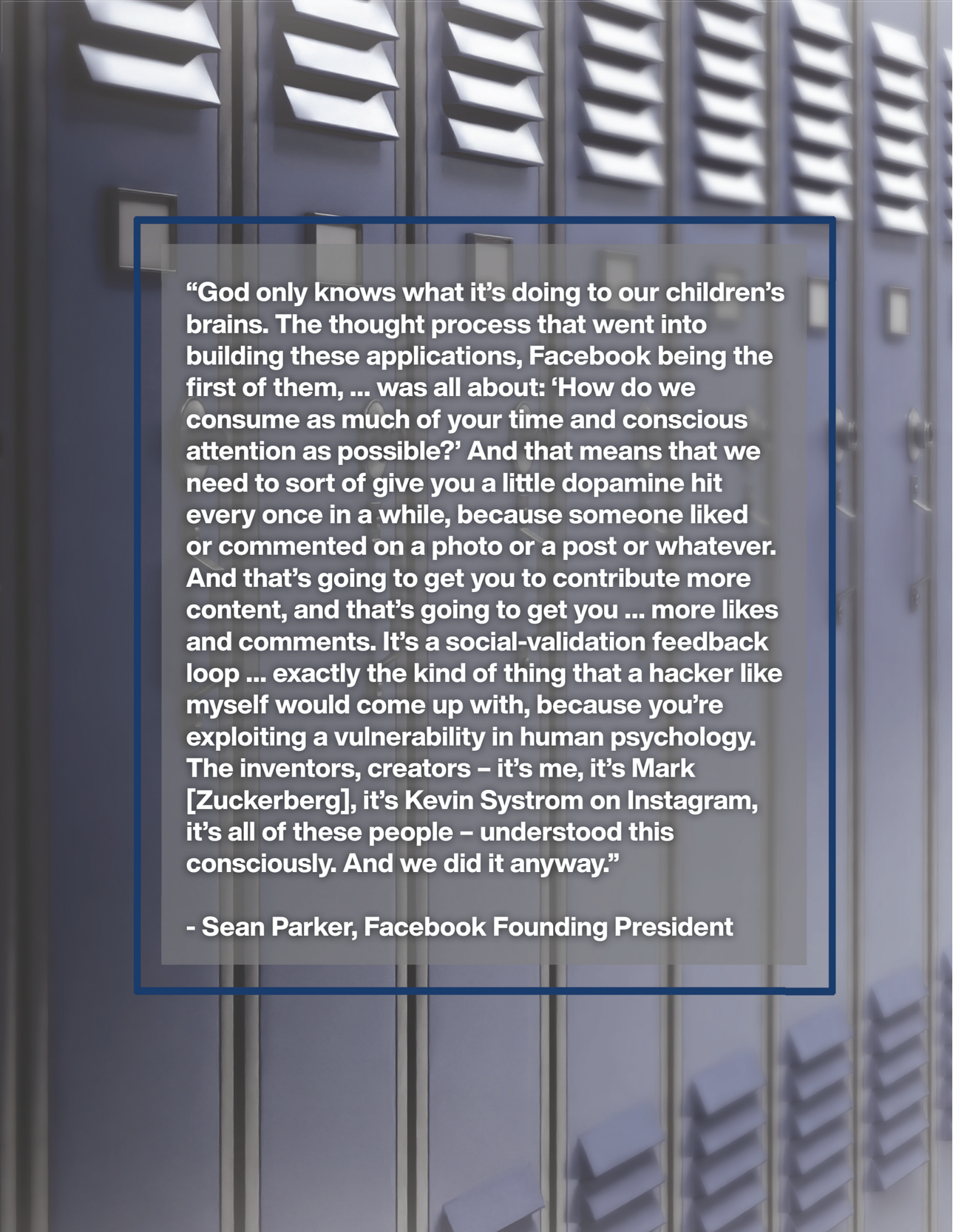
On May 23, 2023, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy issued a public advisory warning of the risks of social media use to young people. In a 19-page report, Dr. Murthy noted, "there are ample indicators that social media can ... have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents."

The advisory warned that social media platforms are often designed to maximize user engagement, which encourages "excessive use and behavioral dysregulation." As of 2021, eighth and 10th graders now spend an average of 3.5 hours per day on social media. The advisory cited research that found adolescents who spent more than three hours per day on social media faced double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, including symptoms of depression and anxiety. This amount of social media exposure can "perpetuate body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors, social comparison, and low self-esteem, especially amongst adolescent girls."

Excessive and problematic social media use, such as compulsive or uncontrollable use, has also been linked to sleep problems, attention problems, and feelings of exclusion among adolescents. The advisory warned that this frequent and problematic social media use can result in changes to adolescents' brain structure, similar to changes seen in individuals with substance use or gambling addiction.

The surgeon general cautioned, "At a moment when we are experiencing a national youth mental health crisis, now is the time to act swiftly and decisively to protect children and adolescents from risk of harm." He called on policymakers, tech companies, researchers, and parents to "urgently take action" to protect youth against these potential risks.

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“God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains. The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them, … was all about: ‘How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?’ And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that’s going to get you to contribute more content, and that’s going to get you … more likes and comments. It’s a social-validation feedback loop … exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you’re exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology. The inventors, creators – it’s me, it’s Mark [Zuckerberg], it’s Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it’s all of these people – understood this consciously. And we did it anyway.”

- Sean Parker, Facebook Founding President

THE LAWSUITS

Social media has invaded school districts across the nation and placed severe burdens on school administrators as they work to find ways to educate students on the dangers of social media addiction and keep it from disrupting the learning environment. Social media addiction and the resulting mental health crisis have forced schools to:

- Hire additional mental health professionals
- Develop lesson plans on social media harms
- Provide more training for educators, staff and the community
- Address property damage caused by mentally anguished students
- Increase disciplinary measures
- Address bullying, harassment and threats
- Confiscate electronic devices
- Notify parents and guardians of students’ behavioral issues and attendance
- Investigate and respond to threats made over social media
- Update student handbooks and school policies

Many schools have diverted educational resources to crack down on the mental health crisis caused by social media addiction. School districts already have limited funds and should not have to allocate budget money for educational campaigns, prevention and treatment of social media harms. The mental heath issues students face include:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, etc.)
- Body dysmorphia (obsessive focus on a perceived flaw in appearance)
- ADD/ADHD
- Lack of focus, inability to concentrate
- Self-harm, thoughts of self-harm
- Suicide, attempted suicide, suicide ideation

The law affords school districts the opportunity to hold social media companies responsible for the damage they cause to our children.

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THE LAWSUITS

Social media companies can be held responsible for past and future expenses for school districts dealing with the effects of their students' social media addictions.

The lawsuits against social media companies request damages to provide relief from the districts' financial losses as a result of arranging outreach and education programs regarding social media harms and hiring additional mental health professionals. The lawsuits also seek an abatement remedy to combat our youth's mental health crisis due to social media addiction.

School districts do not have to pay anything upfront. The law firms handling the cases will front the expenses in the litigation. The school districts would only be required to pay expenses if the law firms obtain a recovery on the school districts' behalf. If the action is not successful, no legal fees are owed.

Many districts across the nation are struggling to protect their students from the mental and physical injuries caused by social media addiction.

Social media companies must be held accountable for creating this widespread mental health crisis among our youth.



OUR LEGAL TEAM

Founded in 1979, Beasley Allen Law Firm is a leader in complex plaintiff litigation nationwide. We work with attorneys and clients across the country and have offices located in Atlanta, Georgia, Dallas, Texas, Mobile, Alabama, and Montgomery, Alabama. Our award-winning attorneys live by our creed of "helping those who need it most."

Beasley Allen lawyers currently hold key leadership in the social media litigation, including being appointed as Co-Lead of the JCCP in California state court and on the Plaintiffs' Leadership Committee in the Social Media Addition/Personal Injury Product Liability MDL.

Joseph VanZandt served on the Plaintiffs' Steering Committee in the national JUUL MDL. He was recognized as a Business Insider "Rising Star of the Courtroom: 15 Great Litigators of the Future" in 2022 and a Law360 Rising Star in 2020. He was also selected to the Super Lawyers "Rising Stars" list in 2021 and 2022 and to the National Trial Lawyers Association's Top 40 Under 40 for Civil Plaintiffs in 2019.

Davis Vaughn was heavily involved in the national JUUL MDL, assisting the Trial, Law & Briefing, Bellwether, Expert, and Discovery Committees with all aspects of case workup, discovery, and trial preparation. He is a member of the Alabama State Bar and American Association for Justice. Davis was selected to the National Trial Lawyers Association's Top 40 Under 40 for Civil Plaintiffs in 2022.



Joseph VanZandt



Davis Vaughn

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OUR LEGAL TEAM

Wagstaff & Cartmell

Founded in 1997 when Tom Wagstaff and Tom Cartmell left a large Kansas City firm to form a boutique, the original vision of Wagstaff and Cartmell was to be a premier trial firm representing both plaintiffs and defendants in complex cases.

Now with 33 attorneys and over 40 supporting staff members, the firm's lawyers appear in cases nationwide, including in multidistrict litigation, class actions, and mass tort cases. The firm has lawyers licensed in California, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, the District of Columbia, and numerous federal district and appellate courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

Wagstaff & Cartmell attorneys have frequently been appointed to senior leadership positions in national multidistrict litigation, state court consolidations, and class actions. In multidistrict litigation against social media companies, the firm represents dozens of adolescents in numerous states across the nation. Tom and Jon have been extensively involved in the social media litigation from the outset, including serving on the JCCP Plaintiffs' Steering Committee.



Tom Cartmell



Jon Kieffer

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gozahonnold TRIAL LAWYERS

Kirk is a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers, a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates, and a Fellow in the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.

Brad has served in numerous leadership positions on a number of successful MDLs. Brad served on the Plaintiffs' Steering Committee of the JUUL MDL.

Kirk and Brad have been extensively involved in the social media litigation from the outset, including serving on the JCCP Plaintiffs' Steering Committee.



Kirk Goza



Bradley Honnold

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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One of our dedicated lawyers will personally meet with you to review your case, for free.