

By: Representative Wallace

To: Judiciary A

HOUSE BILL NO. 599  
(As Sent to Governor)

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 11-77-3, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO  
2 DEFINE THE TERMS "CHILD PORNOGRAPHY" AND "OBSCENE MATTER" AS USED  
3 UNDER STATUTES CREATING A CIVIL LIABILITY FOR DISTRIBUTION OF  
4 CERTAIN MATERIALS ON THE INTERNET BY COMMERCIAL ENTITIES; TO  
5 CREATE NEW SECTION 11-77-6, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO AUTHORIZE  
6 COMMERCIAL ENTITIES THAT KNOWINGLY AND INTENTIONALLY PUBLISH SUCH  
7 MATERIAL ON THE INTERNET TO BE HELD CIVILLY LIABLE FOR DAMAGES TO  
8 INDIVIDUALS; TO AMEND SECTION 11-77-7, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,  
9 TO PROVIDE THAT AN INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER AND OTHER ENTITIES  
10 PROVIDING INTERNET CONNECTIVITY MAY NOT BE HELD LIABLE TO THE  
11 EXTENT THAT THE PROVIDER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTENT CREATION;  
12 TO CREATE NEW SECTION 11-77-9, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO  
13 PROVIDE FOR THE SEVERABILITY OF PROVISIONS; AND FOR RELATED  
14 PURPOSES.

15 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

16 **SECTION 1.** Section 11-77-3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is  
17 amended as follows:

18 11-77-3. As used in this chapter, the following words \* \* \*  
19 have the meanings \* \* \* ascribed in this section:

20 (a) "Child pornography" or "child sexual exploitation"  
21 means those acts that are included in the definition of "sexually  
22 explicit conduct" under Section 97-5-31.



23           ( \* \* \*b) "Commercial entity" includes corporations,  
24   limited liability companies, partnerships, limited partnerships,  
25   sole proprietorships, or other legally recognized entities.

26           ( \* \* \*c) "Distribute" means to issue, sell, give,  
27   provide, deliver, transfer, \* \* \* transmit, circulate, or  
28   disseminate by any means.

29           ( \* \* \*d) "Internet" means the international computer  
30   network of both federal and nonfederal interoperable packet  
31   switched data networks.

32           ( \* \* \*e) "Material harmful to minors" is defined as  
33   all of the following:

34                   (i) Any material that the average person, applying  
35   contemporary community standards, would find, taking the material  
36   as a whole and with respect to minors, is designed to appeal to,  
37   or is designed to pander to, the prurient interest.

38                   (ii) Any of the following material that exploits,  
39   is devoted to, or principally consists of descriptions of actual,  
40   simulated, or animated display or depiction of any of the  
41   following, in a manner patently offensive with respect to minors:

42                           1. Pubic hair, anus, vulva, genitals, or  
43   nipple of the female breast.

44                           2. Touching, caressing, or fondling of  
45   nipples, breasts, buttocks, anuses, or genitals.



46                   3. Sexual intercourse, masturbation, sodomy,  
47 bestiality, oral copulation, flagellation, excretory functions,  
48 exhibitions, or any other sexual act.

49                   (iii) The material taken as a whole lacks serious  
50 literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors.

51                   ( \* \* \*f) "Minor" means any person under the age of  
52 eighteen (18) years.

53                   ( \* \* \*g) "News-gathering organization" means any of  
54 the following:

55                   (i) An employee of a newspaper, news publication,  
56 or news source, printed or on an online or mobile platform, of  
57 current news and public interest, while operating as an employee  
58 as provided in this subparagraph, who can provide documentation of  
59 such employment with the newspaper, news publication, or news  
60 source.

61                   (ii) An employee of a radio broadcast station,  
62 television broadcast station, cable television operator, or wire  
63 service while operating as an employee as provided in this  
64 subparagraph, who can provide documentation of such employment.

65                   (h) "Obscene matter" has the same meaning as provided  
66 under Section 97-29-103(1).

67                   ( \* \* \*i) "Publish" means to communicate or make  
68 information available to another person or entity on a publicly  
69 available Internet website.



70 ( \* \* \*j) "Reasonable age verification methods" include  
71 verifying that the person seeking to access the material is  
72 eighteen (18) years of age or older by using any of the following  
73 methods:

74 (i) Provide a digitized identification card;  
75 (ii) Require the person attempting to access the  
76 material to comply with a commercial age verification system that  
77 verifies in one or more of the following ways:

78 1. Government-issued identification; or  
79 2. Any commercially reasonable method that  
80 relies on public or private transactional data to verify the age  
81 of the person attempting to access the information is at least  
82 eighteen (18) years of age or older.

83 ( \* \* \*k) "Substantial portion" means more than  
84 thirty-three and one-third (33-1/3) percent of total material on a  
85 website, which meets the definition of "material harmful to  
86 minors" as defined by this section.

87 ( \* \* \*l) "Transactional data" means a sequence of  
88 information that documents an exchange, agreement, or transfer  
89 between an individual, commercial entity, or third party used for  
90 the purpose of satisfying a request or event. Transactional data  
91 can include, but is not limited to, records from mortgage,  
92 education, and employment entities.

93 **SECTION 2.** The following shall be codified as Section  
94 11-77-6, Mississippi Code of 1972:



11-77-6. (1) A commercial entity that knowingly and intentionally publishes or distributes obscene matter or matter that depicts, describes or promotes child pornography or child sexual exploitation on the Internet may be held liable to an individual for nominal damages, actual damages, noneconomic damages up to Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00), court costs and reasonable attorney fees as ordered by the court.

(2) A commercial entity that violates this section in a manner that satisfies the legal standards for the imposition of punitive damages may be held liable to an individual for punitive damages.

(3) Individual claims that satisfy the generally applicable legal standards for joinder or class action may be combined into a single action.

**SECTION 3.** Section 11-77-7, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

11-77-7. (1) The provisions of this chapter shall not apply to any bona fide news or public interest broadcast, website video, report, or event and shall not be construed to affect the rights of any news-gathering organizations.

(2) No Internet service provider, \* \* \* affiliate or subsidiary of an Internet service provider, search engine, or cloud service provider shall be held to have violated the provisions of this chapter solely for providing access or connection to or from a website or other information or content on



the Internet or a facility, system, or network not under that provider's control, including transmission, downloading, storage, providing access \* \* \*, or other to the extent such provider is not responsible for the creation of the content of the communication that constitutes material harmful to minors, obscene matter, or matter that depicts, describes or promotes child pornography or child sexual exploitation.

**SECTION 4.** The following shall be codified as Section 11-77-9, Mississippi Code of 1972:

11-77-9. If any one or more provisions, sections, subsections, sentences, clauses, phrases or words of this chapter or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is found to be unconstitutional, the same is declared to be severable, and the balance of this chapter shall remain in effect.

**SECTION 5.** This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2025.

