



Social Media Victims Law Center Files Wrongful Death Lawsuit Alleging Tech Giants Targeted Minors and Hid Evidence as Child Deaths Mounted

Newly unsealed internal documents show [Meta](#), [TikTok](#), [Snap](#), and Google ignored warnings, hid evidence, and targeted underage users, contributing to the deaths of four children

SEATTLE--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- The [Social Media Victims Law Center](#), a national legal advocacy organization representing families harmed by social media and AI-driven platforms, has filed a sweeping personal injury and wrongful death lawsuit against Meta Platforms Inc., Instagram LLC, Facebook Operations LLC, TikTok LLC, ByteDance Inc., Snapchat Inc. (Snap Inc.), and YouTube LLC (Google). The complaint was filed on behalf of four families from Texas, North Carolina, Minnesota, and Tennessee, who allege that their children's deaths by asphyxiation and a gunshot wound of the head occurred after years of escalating harms linked to these companies' addictive and dangerous products.

The lawsuit, filed in the Superior Court of Delaware, draws on newly unsealed internal documents from recent state and federal court proceedings that show these companies ignored repeated warnings from their own researchers, concealed evidence of harm, and built systems that profiled minors during moments of psychological vulnerability. The complaint alleges that the platforms tracked children's behaviors and emotions in real time, then used that data to push diet and beauty advertisements, appearance-changing filters, social comparison features, and algorithmic programming and design choices known to worsen [anxiety](#), [depression](#), [self-harm](#), and [suicidal ideation](#) to maximize user engagement.

Four Children, Four States, One Pattern of Harm

The lawsuit centers on the deaths of four teens, each of whom was healthy, hopeful, and thriving before using social media. Despite living hundreds of miles apart their parents describe nearly identical patterns: once-vibrant children who became anxious, withdrawn, or depressed as their use of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube intensified.

Each of these children died over a fourteen-month period starting in July 2024 and through September 2025, years after these companies assured Congress and parents that they had addressed the very safety concerns their own internal documents showed were still putting children at risk.

Olivia “Livi” Castro, age 13, of Fort Bend County, Texas, was the youngest of seven and the joyful center of her family. She loved pink and purple, dress-up shoes, and anything girly – her parents still remember the sound of her Cinderella heels clicking across the floor before she appeared with a smile that lit up the room. She had no mental health struggles and was a happy, confident child. When she received her first phone in fifth grade, her parents believed they were doing what modern families were told to do: helping her stay connected and safe as school activities increasingly relied on Instagram and TikTok.

As Livi began using Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, everything slowly changed. Her school clubs encouraged kids to join Instagram groups, and trusted organizations like the PTA and Scholastic promoted these apps as safe. Her parents did everything right – they talked to her about safety, installed parental controls, and monitored her device – but behind the scenes, algorithms pushed beauty filters, diet ads, dangerous asphyxiation “blackout” videos, and social comparison harms she never sought out.

On July 30, 2024, her grandmother walked into her bedroom and found her hanging from her bunk bed. Livi had used her karate belt, and her phone — the device she had been holding was on the floor at her feet. She was only 13. Her death shattered her family: her grandmother died the following year from what doctors called Broken Heart Syndrome, her siblings now battle depression and anxiety, and her parents fight every day to keep going.

Nathaniel Chambers, age 17, of Hennepin County, Minnesota, was a bright, artistic teen who loved ballet, books, and long afternoons at the library. He had no history of mental health struggles. After the pandemic started, his parents allowed him to use social media believing it was a safe way to stay connected and find community for questioning youth. He was 13, while the app store claimed these products were safe for kids as young as 12.

Once Nathaniel began using Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, everything changed. He became anxious, withdrawn, and increasingly attached to his phone. Despite his parents’ efforts – talking with him about safety, limiting screen time, even taking devices away – the algorithms kept pushing social comparison and suicidal ideation.

By 2022, Nathaniel no longer wanted to dance, no longer liked how he looked, and was expressing suicidal thoughts. His parents tried to get him help, but the apps kept drawing him back in. On August 11, 2024, he went for a bike ride and didn’t return. After days of searching, police found him in the woods near his home. He had died by hanging.

Dawson Holden, age 18, of Pasquotank County, North Carolina, was a gifted, loving teen who excelled in school and adored sports. He had no history of mental health struggles and was happy, social, and thriving. His mother believed YouTube was harmless and educational, and when Dawson turned 14, she allowed him to use Instagram and TikTok, trusting the companies’ promises that their products were safe for teens.

As Dawson grew older, his use of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube intensified. He became more withdrawn, more tired, and increasingly consumed by appearance-focused advertisements and social comparison features pushed to him. He began obsessing over workout videos, supplements, and diet advertisements, weighing his food, going to the gym daily, and believing he wasn't good enough. Dawson had never struggled with body image before social media, but the platforms' filters, comparison features, and programming choices distorted how he saw himself and eroded his confidence. [Social media addiction](#) and [sleep deprivation](#) made everything that much worse.

On December 8, 2024, Dawson died by gunshot wound to the head at just 18 years old.

Rivers "Riv" Kelleher, age 14, of Franklin County, Tennessee, was an outgoing, loving girl who adored her siblings, went four-wheeling with her dad, and dreamed of going to college in a big city. When she got her first iPhone, her parents believed they were helping her stay safe and connected. They trusted the bright, friendly promises that Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube were fun, harmless and for kids.

Once Riv began using social media, everything changed. She struggled to sleep, jolted awake by late-night notifications she didn't know how to silence. She became obsessed with Snapchat Streaks, felt pressure to keep them going, and soon spiraled into anxiety, depression, and self-harm. Behind the scenes, algorithms profiled her vulnerabilities and pushed beauty filters, diet ads, and social comparison features that eroded her confidence. Riv went from a self-assured girl to someone who wrote that she felt "broken" and didn't understand why.

By 2025, Riv was addicted to Defendants' social media platforms and trapped in a filter bubble of depression, self-harm, and suicide she never sought out. On the morning of September 12, 2025, after an ordinary evening with her family the night before, her father found her sitting in her closet. She had died by hanging at just 14 years old. Her family later learned that one of the last things she did on TikTok was repost a video about a rope tightening around her neck...a chilling sign of what TikTok targets at young kids who are struggling. But also, she tried to loosen the rope before she died.

"The deaths of these four children are the tragic consequence of a decade of misconduct by social media companies that has put millions of young people at risk," said [Matthew P. Bergman](#), founding attorney of Social Media Victims Law Center. "Their actions have eroded public trust, misled policymakers, and created a national youth mental health crisis that has already cost us a generation and will take years to repair."

Even after the first lawsuits were filed in early 2022, these companies continued to hide what they knew. According to the complaint, they buried evidence, kept key documents sealed, and publicly denied that their products were addictive or harmful. They paid teenage influencers and launched ad campaigns to reassure families, partnered with trusted organizations like the National PTA and Scholastic to appear safe, and funded researchers and medical

professionals to say there was nothing to worry about. According to Senator Josh Hawley, Meta even engaged in a “lawfare” campaign to silence by force a Whistleblower trying to alert families like these about the dangers of Facebook and Instagram. All the while, their platforms were hurting children.

The families bringing this lawsuit live in communities represented by lawmakers across the political spectrum. Richmond, Texas is represented by Senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, and Representative Troy Nehls. Maple Grove, Minnesota is represented by Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, and Representative Kelly Morrison. Elizabeth City, North Carolina is represented by Senators Thom Tillis and Ted Budd, and Representative Donald Davis. Decherd, Tennessee is represented by Senators Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty, and Representative Scott DesJarlais. Their stories reflect a national crisis affecting families in every region of the country.

About the Social Media Victims Law Center

The Social Media Victims Law Center (SMVLC), socialmediavictims.org, was founded in 2021 to hold tech companies legally accountable for the harm they inflict on vulnerable users. SMVLC seeks to apply principles of product liability to force tech companies to elevate consumer safety to the forefront of its economic analysis and design safer products to protect users from foreseeable harm.

Media Contact:

Jason Ysaïs

Ysaïs Communications

424-219-5606

jysais@hotmail.com

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