Baroness Jones of Whitchurch
Minister for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

5 September 2025

Dear Maggie,

Many constituents have raised with me their concerns about the security of their personal data in light of the way that many companies are choosing to implement the age verification requirements of the Online Safety Act.

I fully support efforts to improve online safety for children, but it's vital that we do so in a way that protects people's personal data:

- Many companies have materialised overnight requesting extremely sensitive information like face photos, driving licences, passports, and credit cards.

- It's unclear whether these websites are based in the UK or how this information is stored.

- GDPR protects people in theory, but not necessarily in practice, if websites are malicious, uncooperative, or out of reach of authorities.

- These websites could easily be run by malicious actors seeking to conduct fraud and other online crime.

- They could also be run by organisations with poor security practices leading to data breaches that directly compromise personal data.

- Security experts also highlight that the introduction of these websites has the harmful effect of normalising the sharing of highly sensitive personal information with websites of dubious trustworthiness, making data breaches and fraud much more likely across the whole of the online world than before.

There is a much better way of doing this, one that maintains age verification while safeguarding personal data.

Instead of allowing websites to use third party websites to perform age verification, the age verification process could instead be moved to the operating system and browser, with websites required to use this new mechanism and forbidden from using third party websites, except as a fallback.

The Government could work with Google (Android, Chrome), Apple (iOS, macOS, Safari), Microsoft (Windows, Edge), Mozilla (Firefox), and other major operating systems to establish a universally-reusable zero-knowledge proof, with a Web standard for browsers and implementations in all major operating systems.

In simple terms, this would mean that users would only need to provide their identity once for each of the devices they use - Google if they use Android, Apple if they use an iPhone, or Microsoft if they use Windows.

When a website or app needs to verify their age, the user would get a prompt requesting them to prove their age, and when they approve the request, the website or app would be told if they are or are not of age.

This would function much like when a website or app asks for permission to show notifications or use your camera, and would be fully privacy-respecting, as no other identifying information would be shared - it would very simply only share with the website or app that the user is or is not of age.

Companies like Google, Apple, and Microsoft would likely be very open to this, and could implement it very quickly. I would urge the Government to act on this as soon as possible, implementing this new method and ending the use of dangerous third-party websites which are putting personal data at risk every day.

Not only would this solution safeguard precious personal data, but it would likely also lead to greater compliance with this law and wider public acceptance of it.

This is vital for online safety and the security and privacy of personal data.

With kind regards,
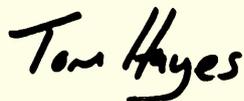
Tom Hayes

Tom Hayes MP
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