

Government's Delay on Porn-Age Verification to Face Court Challenge

The government could be forced to introduce a ban on children watching online pornography after the High Court of Justice in England said it will hear a legal challenge.

Regulations to require pornographers to introduce strict age-verification checks online were approved under the Digital Economy Act in December 2018, but the plans faced delays and were dropped in October last year.

Four different age-verification companies have launched legal action, saying it was unlawful for the government to withdraw the plans after Parliament voted to implement them.

'Hard-Won Legislation'

The restrictions would have meant that anyone visiting a pornographic website from a British IP address had to verify they were over 18 with some form of identification.

After a number of delays, the government dropped the plans and said it would instead rework them into its new Online Harms Bill. However, this bill has not been introduced, and the government has yet to announce the findings from its online harm consultation which closed in July last year.

There have also been suggestions that the regulations could be included in future duty of care legislation, but campaigners say this would see a ban delayed until 2024, leaving thousands more children at risk of exposure to online pornography for years.

Lockdown

Stuart Lawley, chief executive of age verification firm AVSecure LLC, said: “Our primary goal in court is to make the government see sense, dust off this hard-won legislation and take action sooner than 2024 to protect our kids from stumbling over porn.”

A number of children’s charities are also supporting the legal action. John Carr, secretary of the coalition representing the charities, said: “During lockdown large numbers of children have been exposed to and harmed by online pornography who need not have been. If this judicial review can do the Government’s work for it, then bring it on.” {eoa}

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