



Sunday May 24th, 2026

Dear Sir Keir Starmer,

With the Government's consultation on online safety concluding, as Prime Minister you face a demanding choice in the weeks to come. We are clearly an inflection point in respect of online safety – and the decisions you take now may cost or save young lives.

I cannot emphasise enough the gravity of the decisions you are about to take. I am one of many parents who has experienced the unimaginable grief of losing a child to online harms under circumstances that were entirely preventable.

Like most of the bereaved parents I have met, at the time of Molly's death I did not have an understanding of the business models or design choices that cost my daughter's life. In the months and years that followed, I have been shocked and appalled by the callous indifference to the safety and wellbeing of our children from tech companies.

If I may be honest, I have been equally appalled by the watered-down approach taken by successive governments to protect our children, while they instead worried about economic growth, tech investment and lobbying from industry. To be frank, chasing growth from unsafe tech will never reap the predicted rewards.

Given the years of delay and inaction that we've seen, it was perhaps inevitable that we would arrive at this point. Parents and young people deservedly feel abandoned by politicians and regulators that have failed to do enough to rein in harmful social media firms. Right across this country, parents are crying out for decisive action and for meaningful change.

The last few months have seen a spirited and fiercely held exchange of opinions. There are passionate and highly emotional views from the many who are describing the status quo as unacceptable.

At times, the false-binary debate about whether to proceed with an under 16's social media ban has obscured the broader reality – that everyone agrees that decisive action to protect our children online is urgently needed, and that a clear majority of parents want to be equally confident that the Government will commit to steps that will actually work.

As Prime Minister, you will have heard these arguments loud and clear. On the one hand, those arguing for an under 16's social media ban have presented deeply

emotional arguments. Often light on detail, they have suggested that a ban is the simplest approach, that it can enable politicians to demonstrate tangible change, and that it is a decisive firebreak to protect children in the here and now.

Like most of civil society, I just cannot endorse these views. I believe that an under 16's social media ban will quickly unravel, that it will wrongly let tech companies off the hook for their reckless product decisions, and that it will mean children who continue to access social media platforms will find it much more challenging, if not impossible, to speak out and get the help and support they may need and we know can save lives.

The emerging evidence from Australia should not be ignored. Multiple studies have shown that a majority of teenagers, around two-thirds, continue to access prohibited social media accounts. Most young people say they either feel no safer or even less safe. We can do better so we must go beyond a blanket ban.

Expert analysis from the University of Chicago concludes that it is highly unlikely that the threshold needed to achieve a long-term reset in cultural norms can **ever** be achieved solely by an under 16's social media ban, primarily because it is so easy to circumvent restrictions and the cultural cost of doing so is so high.

My views on such a ban are clear. More than ever, I believe in my heart and soul that we will not protect our children from harm if we act on emotion rather than evidence, and if we act on sentiment rather than detail.

I also firmly believe that parents will not look kindly on a government that chooses simplicity over the hard yards, and that chooses a short-term politically expedient route over what is best for the long-term future of our children's safety and wellbeing.

I recognise what a difficult decision now lies ahead. The range of deeply held and strong personal convictions on all sides of this debate means that it may not be possible to please everyone. Some may be bitterly disappointed.

However, in the months and years ahead, we will be able to track in real time the consequences of the decision that you are about to make.

If you choose not to heed the advice of academics and civil society and proceed with an under 16's social media ban, it is likely to quickly unravel. More children will come to preventable harm as a result, and parents will rightly ask why the Government chose to proceed with a plan that the experts did not have confidence in, and that the evidence suggested was unlikely to work.

If you are evidence led, you will deliver a plan that has the teeth and rigour to bring about the transformative and lasting change that parents and young people want, and that the experts say you can achieve. Britain would lead the world with an approach to children's safety that makes building responsible products the price of tech firms doing

business in the UK. That starts with banning high risk design features and functionalities and stopping the laissez faire tolerance of the unacceptable.

Taking bold, evidence-led action will swiftly unite parents and they will cheer you on if you act decisively and with conviction. This is not a time to choose between emotion and evidence, but, for the sake of the nation's children, to deliver what is needed and right.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Russell MBE,

Chair of Molly Rose Foundation

Copied to Liz Kendall, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology