

Utah governor signs divisive measure to require porn filters

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SALT LAKE CITY — Utah is a step closer to requiring all cellphones and tablets sold in the conservative state to automatically block pornography after the Republican governor signed legislation Tuesday that critics call a significant intrusion of free speech.

Gov. Spencer Cox has said the measure would send an “important message” about preventing children from accessing explicit online content. [The proposal](#) is the latest move in Utah’s legislative campaign to curb the availability of porn.

The measure won’t go into effect unless five other states enact similar laws, a provision that was added to address concerns that it would be difficult to implement.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Utah said the constitutionality of the bill was not adequately considered and that it will likely be argued in court.

“This is another example of the Legislature dodging the constitutional impacts of the legislation they pass,” ACLU attorney Jason Groth said.

Critics of the measure, including adult film star Cherie DeVille, had called on the governor to veto the measure because it could violate residents’ First Amendment rights.

Cox has said he isn’t as worried about constitutional concerns because the proposal won’t be immediately enacted.

Rep. Susan Pulsipher, the bill’s sponsor, said she was “grateful” the governor signed the legislation, which she hopes will help parents keep their children from unintended exposure to pornography. She asserts that the measure passes constitutional muster because adults can deactivate the filters, but experts said it still raises several legal concerns.

Supporters argue the restriction is a critical step to help parents keep explicit content away from kids — especially as more children have their own electronic devices.

Combating porn is a perennial issue for Utah lawmakers, who are predominantly members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Lawmakers have previously mandated warning labels on print and online pornography and declared porn a “public health crisis.” Church leaders also have drawn attention to what they consider the harms of pornography.

There is some precedent for other states following Utah’s example on porn restrictions — more than a dozen states advanced similar resolutions to declare porn a public health crisis after Utah became the first to do so in 2016.

Eppolito is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative.

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