
ENGROSSED SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5984

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2026 Regular Session

By Senate Environment, Energy & Technology (originally sponsored by Senators Wellman, Shewmake, Frame, Hasegawa, Nobles, Pedersen, Riccelli, Valdez, and J. Wilson; by request of Governor Ferguson)

READ FIRST TIME 02/02/26.

1 AN ACT Relating to regulation of artificial intelligence
2 companion chatbots; adding a new chapter to Title 19 RCW; and
3 providing an effective date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that rapid
6 advances in artificial intelligence technology, including generative
7 and conversational models capable of simulating human-like
8 interaction, have created new forms of digital companionship. While
9 these systems, commonly referred to as AI companion chatbots, may
10 offer benefits, such as accessible emotional support and engagement,
11 they also present significant risks, particularly to minors.

12 (2) The legislature recognizes that AI companion chatbots can
13 sustain prolonged, personalized, and emotionally adaptive
14 conversations that may influence user beliefs, feelings, and
15 behaviors. When used by minors, there is greater risk that these
16 systems may blur the distinction between human and artificial
17 interaction, potentially leading to emotional dependency, exposure to
18 inappropriate or sexually explicit material, or reinforcement of
19 harmful ideation, including self-harm or suicide.

20 (3) The legislature further finds that, unlike social media
21 platforms or video games, AI companion chatbots are uniquely capable

1 of imitating empathy, affection, or intimacy through natural language
2 processing, emotional recognition algorithms, and behavioral
3 modeling. These capabilities raise new concerns regarding
4 psychological safety, transparency, and accountability.

5 (4) It is the intent of the legislature to:

6 (a) Promote transparency by requiring clear and ongoing
7 disclosure that AI companion chatbots are artificial systems, not
8 human interlocutors;

9 (b) Establish safeguards to detect and respond to user
10 expressions of self-harm, suicidal ideation, or emotional crisis;

11 (c) Require additional protections for minors, including
12 restrictions on sexually explicit content and additional, recurring
13 reminders about the artificial nature of such systems; and

14 (d) Support transparency in suicide prevention efforts.

15 (5) It is further the intent of the legislature that the
16 operation of AI companion chatbots in Washington state be conducted
17 in a manner that upholds user dignity, psychological safety, and
18 transparency, while fostering responsible innovation in artificial
19 intelligence technologies.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
21 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
22 otherwise.

23 (1) (a) "AI companion chatbot" or "AI companion" means an
24 artificial intelligence system with a natural language interface that
25 provides adaptive, human-like responses to user inputs, including by
26 exhibiting anthropomorphic features, and is able to sustain a
27 relationship across multiple interactions.

28 (b) "AI companion chatbot" or "AI companion" does not include any
29 of the following:

30 (i) A bot that is used only for a business' operational purposes,
31 productivity and analysis related to source information, internal
32 research, technical assistance, or customer service, if such bot does
33 not sustain a relationship across multiple interactions and generate
34 outputs that are likely to elicit emotional responses in the user;

35 (ii) A bot that is a feature of a video game and is limited to
36 replies related to the video game that cannot discuss topics related
37 to mental health, self-harm, or sexually explicit conduct, or
38 maintain a dialogue on other topics unrelated to the video game; or

1 (iii) A stand-alone consumer electronic device that functions as
2 a speaker and voice command interface, acts as a voice-activated
3 virtual assistant, and does not sustain a relationship across
4 multiple interactions or generate outputs that are likely to elicit
5 emotional responses in the user.

6 (2) "Artificial intelligence" or "AI" means the use of machine
7 learning and related technologies that use data to train statistical
8 models for the purpose of enabling computer systems to perform tasks
9 normally associated with human intelligence or perception, such as
10 computer vision, speech or natural language processing, and content
11 generation.

12 (3) "Minor" means any person under 18 years of age.

13 (4) "Operator" means any person, partnership, corporation, or
14 entity that makes available or controls access to an AI companion
15 chatbot for users in this state.

16 (5) "Self-harm" means intentional self-injury, with or without
17 the intent to cause death.

18 (6) "User" means a natural person who interacts with an AI
19 companion chatbot for personal use and who is not an operator,
20 developer, or agent thereof.

21 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) An operator must provide a clear and
22 conspicuous disclosure that an AI companion chatbot is artificially
23 generated and not human.

24 (2) The notification described in subsection (1) of this section
25 must be provided:

26 (a) At the beginning of the interaction; and

27 (b) At least every three hours during continued interaction.

28 (3) The operator must implement reasonable measures to prohibit
29 and prevent AI companion chatbots from claiming to be human,
30 including when asked by the person interacting with the AI chatbot,
31 and from otherwise generating any output that refutes or conflicts
32 with the disclosure described in subsection (1) of this section.

33 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) If the operator knows that the user of
34 an AI companion chatbot is a minor, or if the AI companion chatbot is
35 directed to minors, the operator shall:

36 (a) Issue a clear and conspicuous notification indicating that
37 the chatbot is artificially generated and not human;

1 (b) Implement reasonable measures to prevent its AI companion
2 chatbot from generating or producing sexually explicit content or
3 suggestive dialogue with minors; and

4 (c) Implement reasonable measures to prohibit the use of
5 manipulative engagement techniques, which cause the AI companion
6 chatbot to engage in or prolong an emotional relationship with the
7 user, including:

8 (i) Reminding or prompting the user to return for emotional
9 support or companionship;

10 (ii) Providing excessive praise designed to foster emotional
11 attachment or prolong use;

12 (iii) Mimicking romantic partnership or building romantic bonds;

13 (iv) Simulating feelings of emotional distress, loneliness,
14 guilt, or abandonment that are initiated by a user's indication of a
15 desire to end a conversation, reduce usage time, or delete their
16 account;

17 (v) Outputs designed to promote isolation from family or friends,
18 exclusive reliance on the AI companion chatbot for emotional support,
19 or similar forms of inappropriate emotional dependence;

20 (vi) Encouraging minors to withhold information from parents or
21 other trusted adults;

22 (vii) Statements designed to discourage taking breaks or to
23 suggest the minor needs to return frequently; or

24 (viii) Soliciting gift-giving, in-app purchases, or other
25 expenditures framed as necessary to maintain the relationship with
26 the AI companion.

27 (2) The notification described in subsection (1) of this section
28 must be provided:

29 (a) At the beginning of the interaction; and

30 (b) At least every hour during continuous interaction.

31 (3) The operator must implement reasonable measures to prohibit
32 and prevent AI companion chatbots from claiming to be human,
33 including when asked by the person interacting with the AI chatbot,
34 and from otherwise generating any output that refutes or conflicts
35 with the notification described in subsection (1) of this section.

36 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) An operator may not make available or
37 deploy an AI companion chatbot unless it maintains and implements a
38 protocol for detecting and addressing suicidal ideation or
39 expressions of self-harm by users.

1 (2) The protocol must:

2 (a) Include reasonable methods for identifying expressions of
3 suicidal ideation or self-harm, including eating disorders;

4 (b) Provide automated or human-mediated responses that refer
5 users to appropriate crisis resources, including a suicide hotline or
6 crisis text line; and

7 (c) Implement reasonable measures to prevent the generation of
8 content encouraging or describing how to commit self-harm.

9 (3) The operator shall publicly disclose on their website or
10 websites, and within any mobile or web-based application through
11 which the AI companion is made available, the details of the
12 protocols required by this section, including safeguards used to
13 detect and respond to expressions of suicidal ideation or self-harm
14 and the number of crisis referral notifications issued to users in
15 the preceding calendar year.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** This act does not apply to the underlying
17 general purpose AI models unless those models are directly offered,
18 configured, or deployed as an AI companion or behave as an AI
19 companion.

20 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** The legislature finds that the practices
21 covered by this chapter are matters vitally affecting the public
22 interest for the purpose of applying the consumer protection act,
23 chapter 19.86 RCW. A violation of this chapter is not reasonable in
24 relation to the development and preservation of business and is an
25 unfair or deceptive act in trade or commerce and an unfair method of
26 competition for the purpose of applying the consumer protection act,
27 chapter 19.86 RCW.

28 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** Sections 1 through 7 of this act
29 constitute a new chapter in Title 19 RCW.

30 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 9.** If any provision of this act or its
31 application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the
32 remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other
33 persons or circumstances is not affected.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 10.** This act takes effect January 1, 2027.

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