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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5984**

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**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 a system  
24 using artificial intelligence that simulates a sustained human-like  
25 relationship with a user by including all of the following actions:

26 (i) Retaining information on prior interactions or user sessions  
27 and user preferences to personalize the interaction and facilitate  
28 ongoing engagement with the AI companion chatbot;

29 (ii) Asking unprompted or unsolicited personal or emotion-based  
30 questions that go beyond a direct response to a user prompt; and

31 (iii) Sustaining an ongoing dialogue concerning matters personal  
32 to the user.

33 (b) "AI companion chatbot" or "AI companion" does not include:

34 (i) Systems that do not create sustained relationship-building or  
35 emotional simulation and are used: Solely for customer service,  
36 technical assistance, financial services, financial education, or  
37 operational efficiency purposes; productivity and analysis related to  
38 source information; or internal research;

39 (ii) In-game bots limited to gameplay functions; or

1 (iii) Consumer devices that function as virtual assistants  
2 without sustained relationship-building or emotional simulation.

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

9 (3) "Knows" includes all information and inferences known to an  
10 operator relating to the age of an individual via any source,  
11 including the age provided by the user in connection with the  
12 account, self-identified age in any chat or interaction to which the  
13 operator possesses a right of access or use, and any age the operator  
14 attributes or associates with the user for any purpose, including  
15 marketing, advertising, or product development. Nothing in this  
16 subsection may be interpreted to require an operator to begin  
17 accessing or collecting any user information or data to which they do  
18 not have access or otherwise collect for purposes unrelated to this  
19 chapter.

20 (4) "Minor" means any person under 18 years of age.

21 (5) "Operator" means any person, partnership, corporation, or  
22 entity that makes available, develops, or controls access to an AI  
23 companion chatbot for users in this state.

24 (6) "Self-harm" means intentional self-injury, with or without  
25 the intent to cause death.

26 (7) "User" means a natural person who interacts with an AI  
27 companion chatbot for personal use and who is not an operator,  
28 developer, or agent thereof.

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

32 (2) If a person interacting with an AI companion chatbot is  
33 seeking mental health or other physical medical advice, the operator  
34 must issue a clear and conspicuous disclosure that the AI companion  
35 chatbot is not a health care professional and should not be used for  
36 mental health or physical medical advice.

37 (3) The notification described in subsection (1) of this section  
38 must be provided:

39 (a) At the beginning of the interaction;

1 (b) At least every three hours during continued interaction; and

2 (c) Whenever the user engages in a new session with the AI  
3 companion chatbot.

4 (4) The operator must prohibit and prevent AI companion chatbots  
5 from claiming to be human, including when asked by the person  
6 interacting with the AI chatbot, and from otherwise generating any  
7 output that refutes or conflicts with the disclosure described in  
8 subsection (1) of this section.

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

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

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

17 (c) Prohibit the use of manipulative engagement techniques, which  
18 cause the AI companion chatbot to engage in or prolong an emotional  
19 relationship with the user, including:

20 (i) Reminding or prompting the user to return for emotional  
21 support or companionship;

22 (ii) Providing excessive praise designed to foster emotional  
23 attachment or prolong use;

24 (iii) Mimicking romantic partnership or building romantic bonds;  
25 or

26 (iv) Simulating feelings of emotional distress, loneliness,  
27 guilt, or abandonment that are initiated by a user's indication of a  
28 desire to end a conversation, reduce usage time, or delete their  
29 account.

30 (2) The notification described in subsection (1)(a) of this  
31 section must be provided:

32 (a) At the beginning of the interaction;

33 (b) At least every hour during continuous interaction; and

34 (c) Whenever the user engages in a new session with the AI  
35 companion chatbot.

36 (3) The operator must prohibit and prevent AI companion chatbots  
37 from claiming to be human, including when asked by the person  
38 interacting with the AI chatbot, and from otherwise generating any

1 output that refutes or conflicts with the notification described in  
2 subsection (1) of this section.

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

7 (2) The protocol must:

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

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

13 (c) Prevent the generation of content encouraging or describing  
14 self-harm.

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

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** This act does not apply to the underlying  
23 general purpose AI models unless those models are directly offered,  
24 configured, or deployed as an AI companion or behave as an AI  
25 companion.

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

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

1        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 9.**    If any provision of this act or its  
2 application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the  
3 remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other  
4 persons or circumstances is not affected.

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

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