

October 21, 2026

Re: Recommendations for effectively supporting children and youth through the Meta settlement

Dear State Attorneys General,

The \$17 billion [settlement agreement](#) in [People of the State of California, et al. v. Meta Platforms, Inc., et al.](#) represents one of the largest consumer protection settlements in history. It presents a vital opportunity for your state to advance the mental health and well-being of children and youth. It also provides a critical opportunity to mitigate the harm they've suffered in connection with social media. The time to act, plan, and build is now, and the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) offers our partnership and expertise to help you successfully support youth.

The Opportunity

States will be making consequential choices about how to use their respective portions of the Meta settlement funds to best serve young people. Given the power and authority you hold, you can make significant — even unprecedented — impacts on the well-being of children, youth, and families in your state. NCYL invites you to consider us a partner in this effort. Drawing on our 55+ years of experience working with young people, families, and the systems meant to serve them, we can provide clear, actionable recommendations as we work toward the shared goal of long-term health and well-being for our nation's young people.

Ensuring a Win for Children & Youth

To build systems and deliver support that works for young people and results in positive long-term impacts on their health and well-being, states must:

- **Center the needs and experiences of young people.**
- **Meet young people where they are and make support accessible.**
- **Invest in effective, sustainable supports and interventions.**

We explore specific strategies and recommendations within these general categories below.

Recommendations

The following strategies and recommendations are intentionally high-level, aligned with the core focus areas described in the settlement agreement,¹ and offered with the understanding that every state has different existing structures and systems to support young people, and may be subject to different terms regarding use of settlement funds. These recommendations focus on the effective use of funds to protect and advance mental health for children, recognizing that there are other recommendations that would most effectively address other aspects of the harms experienced by children and youth that must be incorporated as well.

As a state leader, we urge you to:

Center the needs and experiences of young people.

- ***Listen carefully to young people.*** The specific experiences that young people are having with social media and other rapidly evolving technologies are unique to their generation. They are the experts on these experiences and the resulting harms. Partner with youth leaders, youth councils, and youth advisory boards to ensure that solutions are directly responsive to their real and immediate needs. Ask youth what types of support they value most and are most likely to access. Continue to provide meaningful, paid opportunities for youth partnership and leadership on an ongoing basis as the programs and services supported by the settlement funds are implemented. Youth should not merely be one of many stakeholder groups that you engage in this process, they should be given voice, agency, and the authority needed to meaningfully shape how the funds are spent and the terms of the settlement agreement are implemented.
- ***Create youth participatory budgeting processes.*** Participatory budgeting can be a vital process to empower youth to determine their own community priorities. The Meta settlement agreement provides an ideal opportunity to involve youth in the budgeting process for the settlement funds. There are models, both domestically and internationally, of how governments have successfully and effectively incorporated youth-led, youth-serving, and community-led organizations into budgeting and decision-making processes.

¹ The Meta settlement agreement outlines several areas for possible investment of funds. Specifically, it provides that the amount paid to each state must be used for any lawful purpose consistent with the authority of that state's Attorney General, including the following remedial or restitutive purposes: Crisis intervention services, specifically the expansion and operation of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and text-based youth crisis lines; After school or summer programs, such as sports, literacy, dance, and other activities; Public health advertising credits; A digital wellness public education fund; Funding outdoor activities; Youth mental health programming; Support the hiring of digital literacy counselors or implement phone-free school zones; Training for medical providers on interactive media use and body dysmorphia; Grants to school districts or other local government entities to accomplish any remedial purpose encompassed here; Any similar remedial or restitutive purposes as those described above; and Investigation, litigation, and related efforts to improve teen safety on social media.

Meet young people where they are and make support accessible.

- ***Embrace school-based and school-linked mental health education and care models.*** Schools are a critical access point for many young people, including those who face practical barriers to accessing care elsewhere, such as youth experiencing homelessness and youth from low-income households. Wherever possible, promote partnerships between schools and community-based mental health providers, who can provide students with individualized, effective, HIPAA-compliant and confidential care.
- ***Grow peer and near-peer support programs.*** Young people consistently report that they look to their friends and same or similarly aged peers for support. As such, peer support can be an important bridge for access to clinical mental health services. To leverage this, invest in strategies that effectively train and guide peer supporters and mentors.
- ***Expand access to mental health education, including digital literacy/wellness education.*** Ensure all young people in your state, along with their caregivers and youth-serving adults (such as educators), have an opportunity to learn about mental health and well-being in a stigma-free setting, to develop at least a baseline level of knowledge regarding mental health and well-being, and understand when and where to seek support for themselves and others. This education must also include investment in digital literacy. While the safeguards that Meta is required to implement across its platforms will hopefully help mitigate harms, they will not eliminate them. Youth will also need to be equipped with an understanding of how to safely navigate the online world, including issues such as privacy protection, avoiding exploitation by both online platforms and other users, and understanding how to distinguish between human-created and AI-generated content. Children's exposure to online platforms begins early, and it's important that this education is provided early and often.
- ***Take an equitable approach.*** Consider the needs of youth sub-populations with heightened attention to young people who face increased barriers to mental health care. For example, youth in low-income households are facing increased challenges given federal cuts to healthcare and other social safety net programs, and support for those who identify as LGBTQ+ has been weakened through federal actions, such as executive actions that target access to medically-necessary, gender-affirming care. This should also include meeting the specific needs of, and reinforcing the supports available to, systems-involved youth, including those in the foster system, the juvenile justice system, and youth experiencing homelessness.

Invest in effective, sustainable supports and interventions.

- ***Invest in evidence-based interventions and community-defined evidence practices with demonstrated impacts on youth mental health.*** In order to be as successful as possible, the settlement funds should be disbursed in ways that positively impact the full range of diverse young people in your state. To that end, you should fund and expand programs that have a proven track record of supporting a wide range of young people. In addition to supporting evidence-based practices, you should also invest in community-defined evidence practices, which are grounded in cultural wisdom. These practices are essential in reaching historically underserved communities. For example, see the California Department of Health Care Services [*Children and Youth Evidence-Based Practices and Community Defined Evidence Practices Resource Guide*](#) (June 2026).
- ***Provide support across the continuum of mental health care, including upstream prevention initiatives, early intervention, and crisis support, as well as clinical treatment.*** Promoting protective factors — such as stable, nurturing relationships, school connectedness and belonging, peer networks, and engagement in healthy activities — is an important part of mitigating the harms caused by social media and advancing youth mental health. Invest in programs that create and expand these environments and opportunities, particularly in your state’s under-resourced communities. In addition, invest in pathways that increase early identification of mental health needs. Half of lifetime mental illness diagnoses begin [by age 14](#), and 75% begin by age 24. Despite this, prevention and early intervention programs are particularly vulnerable to budget cuts in difficult economic circumstances; investments that shore up these programs could help decrease acute crises, improve long-term outcomes, and save lives. Access to crisis support, including mobile crisis support, from trained mental health clinicians is also key. It helps defuse acute needs in home, school, and community settings; connects youth with treatment options; and helps reduce entry into the school-to-prison pipeline by avoiding misplaced law enforcement involvement.
- ***Focus on human-delivered care.*** Youth seeking mental health care deserve access to individualized treatment from trained, professional mental health clinicians. While outsourcing mental health support to AI chatbots may seem like a convenient and cost-efficient solution, it is often counterproductive; it also raises ethical and legal concerns. Putting the settlement funds back into the private technology sector — the industry that perpetrated the very harms asserted by plaintiffs — would undermine the purpose of the litigation and be a grave disservice to the young people whose experiences drove it.

- ***Identify opportunities to maximize the financial impact of the funds.*** Investigate whether and how your state's funds can be used as the state share to draw down federal Medicaid matching dollars. Also consider the lifetime of the settlement funds, and plan for longer-term sustainability of the programs the funds will support.

This settlement agreement provides an unprecedented opportunity to make meaningful investments in our young people and set them up on a pathway to success. We appreciate your consideration of these guiding principles and recommendations, and NCYL will remain a resource to provide any assistance that might be helpful. Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or requests for support. We look forward to working with you to ensure the settlement funds advance youth mental health and well-being in your state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shakti Belway', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Shakti Belway
Executive Director
National Center for Youth Law