

UK Defends Online Safety Act Amid Free Speech Claims

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The UK Government has strongly defended its Online Safety Act following public criticism from Elon Musk's platform, X (formerly Twitter), which claimed the legislation poses a threat to free expression.

In a statement titled *What Happens When Oversight Becomes Overreach*, X warned that the new law may lead to excessive government control over online content. The platform

argued that while protecting children online is crucial, it should not compromise legitimate expression.

A government spokesperson responded by calling X's claims "demonstrably false," asserting that the Act does not censor political speech but instead ensures greater protection for users, especially children, from harmful online material.

The legislation, which came into force on 25 July, requires digital platforms to block illegal content and prevent minors from accessing material such as pornography or content promoting suicide. This includes strict age verification measures for users in the UK attempting to view adult material.

In response to the law, Ofcom has opened investigations into 34 websites suspected of failing to meet new age-check obligations. Regulators are reviewing whether these sites have implemented proper safeguards to restrict access by underage users.

X's statement warned that the "laudable intentions" of the legislation risk being undermined by the scope of its enforcement. "Without a more balanced, collaborative approach, free speech will suffer," the company said.

However, the UK Government insisted that online companies have had sufficient time to comply. A spokesperson said, "Platforms have had several months to prepare for this law. It is a disservice to their users to hide behind deadlines as an excuse for failing to properly implement it."

The row escalated further when Reform UK leader Nigel Farage promised to repeal the Act if elected. Technology Secretary Peter Kyle criticised Farage's stance, accusing him of siding with "extreme pornographers" over the protection of children online.

Under the Online Safety Act, platforms that fail to meet the law's standards risk fines of up to £18 million or 10% of their global annual revenue, whichever is higher.

The debate highlights growing tensions between regulatory enforcement and the principles of online freedom in the UK's evolving digital landscape.