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4 SYNOPSIS:

5 This bill would require the Department of Early
6 Childhood Education to develop guidelines for the
7 appropriate use of screen-based media in early
8 childhood education programs, which includes day care
9 centers, day care homes, group day care homes, night
10 care facilities, prekindergarten, and kindergarten.

11 This bill would require the Department of Early
12 Childhood Education, in collaboration with the State
13 Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the State
14 Department of Education, to develop screen time
15 standards for early childhood education programs.

16 This bill would require the standards to address
17 age-appropriate screen time limits, guidelines for what
18 constitutes high-quality programming, and best
19 practices for screen time in early childhood education
20 programs.

21 This bill would require the Department of Early
22 Childhood Education, in collaboration with DHR and the
23 State Board of Education, to create a training program
24 on the appropriate use of screen time for teachers and
25 other staff members who supervise children.

26 This bill would require day care centers, day
27 care homes, group day care homes, and night care
28 facilities to implement the guidelines and training



29 requirements as a condition for licensure by DHR.

30 This bill would require certain prekindergarten
31 classrooms and each public kindergarten classroom to
32 implement the guidelines and training requirements.

33 This bill would require DHR to oversee the
34 implementation of this act for licensed child-care
35 facilities, the Secretary of the Department of Early
36 Childhood Education for prekindergarten classrooms, and
37 local boards of education for kindergarten classrooms.

38 This bill would also authorize the Department of
39 Early Childhood Education, DHR, and the State Board of
40 Education to adopt rules.

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43 A BILL

44 TO BE ENTITLED

45 AN ACT

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47 Relating to early childhood education; to add Article
48 4, commencing with Section 26-24-60, to Chapter 24, Title 26,
49 and Sections 16-40-15 and 38-7-7.1 to the Code of Alabama
50 1975; to require the Department of Early Childhood Education,
51 in collaboration with the State Department of Human Resources
52 (DHR) and the State Department of Education, to develop
53 standards and relevant annual training requirements for
54 appropriate screen time use in early childhood education
55 settings; to require each state agency to implement the
56 guidelines and training requirements for the early childhood



57 education programs under their jurisdiction; to condition
58 licensing of certain child-care facilities on compliance with
59 screen time guidelines; and to authorize the Department of
60 Early Childhood Education, DHR, and the State Board of
61 Education to adopt rules.

62 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

63 Section 1. (a) This act shall be known and may be cited
64 as the Healthy Early Development and Screen Time Act.

65 (b) The Legislature finds and declares all of the
66 following:

67 (1) Birth through five years of age is a child's most
68 critical period of rapid brain development, language
69 acquisition, and social-emotional growth.

70 (2) Published peer-reviewed research demonstrates that
71 excessive screen exposure in children under three years of age
72 is associated with delayed communication skills, impaired
73 problem-solving, and reduced social interaction.

74 (3) National and international pediatric authorities
75 including, but not limited to, the American Academy of
76 Pediatrics, recommend little to no screen time for children
77 under two years of age and no more than one hour per day of
78 high-quality, adult-supervised screen use for children who are
79 two through five years of age.

80 (4) High-quality educational media used interactively
81 with adult participation may provide some benefit, but should
82 not displace physical activity, caregiver interaction, or
83 sleep time.

84 (5) It is the intent of this state to provide parents,



85 caregivers, and educators with research-based guidelines and
86 standards regarding screen time to safeguard children's
87 healthy development.

88 Section 2. A new Article 4, commencing with Section
89 26-24-60, is added to Chapter 24 of Title 26, Code of Alabama
90 1975, to read as follows:

91 Article 4

92 §26-24-60

93 For the purposes of this article, the following terms
94 have the following meanings:

95 (1) ADULT-SUPERVISED USE. Media engagement in which a
96 parent, guardian, or caregiver is actively present and guiding
97 and discussing the media content.

98 (2) DEPARTMENT. The Department of Early Childhood
99 Education.

100 (3) EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM. a. All of the
101 following:

102 1. A licensed child-care facility that serves children
103 five years of age and younger.

104 2. Prekindergarten programs operating under Article 2.

105 3. Public kindergarten programs.

106 b. In addition to regular school day programs, the term
107 includes any after-school, extended day, or summer program
108 provided by a facility or program described in paragraph a.

109 (4) HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMMING. Screen-based media
110 programs and platforms used in early childhood education
111 programs.

112 (5) LICENSED CHILD-CARE FACILITY. All of the following:



113 a. A day care center as defined in Section 38-7-2.

114 b. A day care home as defined in Section 38-7-2.

115 c. A group day care home as defined in Section 38-7-2.

116 d. A night care facility as defined in Section 38-7-2.

117 (6) SCREEN-BASED MEDIA. Visual media devices including,

118 but not limited to, televisions, computers, smart phones, and
119 tablets.

120 (7) SCREEN TIME. Time spent using screen-based media.

121 The term does not include live, interactive video
122 communication, such as a video call with a child's family.

123 §26-24-61

124 (a) The department, in collaboration with the State
125 Department of Human Resources and the State Department of
126 Education, shall develop research-based guidelines on healthy
127 screen time practices for children from birth through five
128 years of age. The guidelines shall be based on current
129 evidence-based research and practices.

130 (b) The guidelines shall emphasize all of the
131 following:

132 (1) The importance of play, reading, physical activity,
133 and caregiver-child interaction.

134 (2) The risks of excessive screen time on children,
135 including developmental delays and behavioral impacts.

136 (3) Strategies for setting screen-time-free routines in
137 the home.

138 (c) The department shall publish the guidelines on the
139 department website at no cost to the public.

140 §26-24-62



141 (a) Screen-based media in early childhood education
142 programs:

143 (1) May not be unreasonably used as a substitute for
144 teacher-led instruction, reading, hands-on learning, or
145 outdoor play;

146 (2) Must meet the department's screen time standards as
147 provided in Section 26-24-63; and

148 (3) Must be actively supervised by staff.

149 (b) Background television and passive screen time is
150 prohibited in early childhood education programs.

151 (c) This article shall not apply to any of the
152 following:

153 (1) The screen time of any student acting pursuant to
154 the student's Individualized Education Program, Section 504
155 plan, or Individualized Health Plan.

156 (2) Screen time by any kindergarten student necessary
157 to complete required diagnostic tests and assessments.

158 (3) Screen time by any student enrolled in classes
159 offered as part of a virtual school or virtual program
160 approved by a local board of education.

161 (d) The department, the State Department of Human
162 Resources, and the State Board of Education may adopt rules to
163 implement and administer this article.

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165 The department, in collaboration with the State
166 Department of Human Resources and the State Department of
167 Education, shall develop screen time standards for early
168 childhood education programs which are based on current



169 evidence-based research and practices. The standards shall
170 include the following:

171 (1) Age-appropriate screen time limits, provided that
172 no screen time may be allowed for students under two years of
173 age.

174 (2) Guidelines for determining what constitutes
175 high-quality programming. In establishing the guidelines, all
176 of the following factors must be considered:

177 a. The target audience of the program and whether the
178 program is age-appropriate in an early childhood education
179 setting.

180 b. The pacing of the program, with a preference toward
181 slow-paced programming.

182 c. Whether the programming is free of violence.

183 d. Whether the programming is free of advertisement
184 that the department determines is harmful to children.

185 (3) Best practices for screen time in early childhood
186 education programs.

187 \$26-24-64

188 (a) The department, in collaboration with the State
189 Department of Human Resources and the State Department of
190 Education, shall develop training on screen time standards
191 provided in Section 26-24-63 and alternatives to screen time.
192 The training may be tailored to each type of early childhood
193 education program.

194 (b) Each early childhood education program teacher and
195 staff member who closely supervises children shall complete
196 the training annually.



197 §26-24-65

198 (a) Compliance with this article shall be monitored and
199 enforced by the following entities:

200 (1) For child-care facilities licensed by the State
201 Department of Human Resources, by the State Department of
202 Human Resources pursuant to Section 38-7-7.1.

203 (2) For prekindergarten programs operating under
204 Article 2, by the department pursuant to subsection (b).

205 (3) For public kindergarten, by the local school
206 principal pursuant to Section 16-40-15.

207 (b) (1) In addition to the standards established
208 pursuant to Article 2, each prekindergarten operating under
209 Article 2 shall implement and abide by a screen time policy
210 that meets the requirements of this article and reflects the
211 screen time standards established pursuant to Section
212 26-24-63.

213 (2) The secretary of the department shall monitor
214 prekindergarten compliance with this article as he or she
215 deems necessary, provided that the secretary must:

216 a. Include a screen time policy in the Office of School
217 Readiness Program Guidelines;

218 b. Require prekindergarten teachers to annually
219 complete the training required by Section 26-24-64; and

220 c. In the event that a prekindergarten is not in
221 compliance with this section, prioritize additional training
222 with relevant staff members. If noncompliance continues, the
223 department may establish or enforce a corrective action plan.

224 Section 3. Section 16-40-15 is added to the Code of



225 Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

226 §16-40-15

227 No later than the 2027-2028 school year, each local
228 board of education shall adopt a screen time policy that
229 provides guidance on the appropriate use of screen-based media
230 in kindergarten classrooms. The policy shall:

231 (1) Meet the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 24 of
232 Title 26, with respect to kindergarten classrooms;

233 (2) Require kindergarten teachers to annually complete
234 the screen time training created pursuant to Section 26-24-63;
235 and

236 (3) If a kindergarten teacher is not in compliance with
237 this section, require the local school principal to first
238 provide additional training for the noncompliant teacher.

239 Continued noncompliance shall be considered a violation of the
240 Alabama Educator Code of Ethics, and the principal may proceed
241 with disciplinary action as adopted by the State Department of
242 Education, including corrective action, with approval from the
243 local superintendent of education.

244 Section 4. Section 38-7-7.1 is added to the Code of
245 Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

246 §38-7-7.1

247 (a) In addition to the standards for licensing
248 established pursuant to Section 38-7-7, each day care center,
249 day care home, group day care home, and night care facility
250 shall implement and abide by a screen time policy that meets
251 the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 24 of Title 26, as a
252 condition for licensing under this chapter.



253 (b) The department shall incorporate a screen time
254 policy that meets the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 24 of
255 Title 26, in the department's minimum standards for licensing
256 and approving day care centers, day care homes, group day care
257 homes, and night care facilities, as defined by this chapter,
258 and monitor compliance with this section as the department
259 deems necessary, provided that the department must:

260 (1) Review compliance during any inspection under
261 Section 38-7-11;

262 (2) Require staff who supervise children to undergo
263 training established pursuant to Section 26-24-64; and

264 (3) If a child-care facility listed in subsection (b)
265 is not in compliance with this section, prioritize additional
266 training through the Department of Early Childhood Education
267 with the noncompliant staff members. If noncompliance
268 continues, the department may adopt or enforce a corrective
269 action plan.

270 Section 5. This act shall become effective on January
271 1, 2027.