

# Colorado to Criminalize Screen Time for Kids

If a Colorado initiative gets its way 49 other states are going to be looking like anarcho-capitalist havens. [Initiative 29](#) or the “Preservation of a Natural childhood” could make selling smartphones, tablets, and any sort of handheld wireless technology to anyone aged 13 and younger illegal which is anything but natural.

The title attempts to conjure up delightful images of a childhood free from responsibility, being driven to hockey practice, playing late into the night, and the parental figures providing all of life’s necessities. Initiative 29 capitalizes on feel good impressions, disregarding thousands of years of personal advancements.

However, this image is very unnatural. Neither electricity or cars are part of a natural childhood, and as comedian Jim Gaffigan puts it neither is using the bathroom indoors. We are surrounded by the unnatural. Colorado Initiative 29 capitalizes on your feel good impressions, disregarding thousands of years of positive advancements.

Expectantly the announcement has raised concern over state paternalism, but there are much more meaningful and deeper issues at play. Advocates are overlooking huge benefits of these technologies and are seeing smartphones as the cause of idleness rather than as the symptom. They are turning families and businesses into criminals overnight.

## **Look at the positives**

How could parents be so oblivious to the problems this technology is causing? The answer is parents are aware of the problems wireless devices can have, but they are also fully

aware of the benefits too.

These wireless handheld devices are improving lives. Children can call parents after post-school activities, they promote independence, and are a lifeline when in trouble. Children can connect with grandparents and loved ones across the world as well as tutors. They create an easier way research, learn and yes, play games.

These devices can teach children responsibility, respect of personal property, limits for online time and online critical thinking in a dangerous world. Skills that can be cultivated at a young age with parental advice, instead of the hormone-fueled world of middle and high school where peer pressure plays a major factor in decisions.

The initiative's advocates are somewhat correct in finding that overuse can have certain ill wanted effects on children. Whether this is lashing out when taken away or as a proponent of Initiative 29 Tim Farnum says, " there's just no good that comes from that." However, if one only looked at negatives of any technology then bicycles should be banned. Every year they cause thousands of boo-boos and are involved in severe life ending crashes with motor vehicles. However, bikes are not banned, because like smartphones they offer more benefits if used responsibly than if they did not exist at all.

**No work and no play makes Jack an idle boy. Cultural norms are treating children as delicate flowers**

Children's inactivity is a major rallying cry for the advocates of the initiative. However, smartphones are not the cause of this idleness, smartphones are the symptom. Decades of regulations and cultural norms are treating children as delicate flowers which leads to these unintended consequences.

In [Free To Learn](#), educational psychologist Dr. Peter Gray found "Surveys of game players in the general population,

indicate that kids who are free to play outdoors as well as with video games usually, over time, choose a balance between the two." Not only do children strike a balance in their life, but "Video-game play appears to compete much more with television watching than with outdoor play for children's free time."

Dr. Peter Gray concludes resorting to screen time is more than likely a result of decreased unmonitored play time and less freedom via helicopter parenting. "The nine-year-old may not be allowed to walk to the corner store by himself, but he is allowed to enter into and explore freely an exciting virtual world filled with all sorts of dangers and delights." Adding, "When kids are asked, in focus groups and surveys, what they like about video games, they generally talk about freedom, self-direction, and competence."

Personally, I acquired my first job selling/harvesting produce at a farm when I was 13. Securing this job was nearly impossible due to OSHA, the minimum wage, and the fact that I was worthless as I had no useful skills. For me the most important piece of this opportunity was the failures I made that later led to success setting myself up for an independent life.

If these "feel gooders" with Initiative 29 wanted to help children become active, then encourage work like [lemonade stands](#), apprenticeships, getting a job below the minimum wage (because a 13 year old is not worth \$9.30/ hour: I know I wasn't), give them freedom to fail, and encourage exploration. Let them realize how creating value in exchange for a desired goal is a moral endeavor.

[Jeffrey Tucker](#) critiques our culture well, "We push these kids through the system and deny them any chance to realize their human value in gainful employment in a community of productivity and real learning." School programs are designed to mimic what is learned "on the job." Why are we afraid of

[letting children discover the workplace](#) and learn firsthand during the best time of their lives to fail and make mistakes?

### **Who's a criminal? Your Mom!**

The initiative seeks to penalize retailers and requires stores to ["interrogate adult consumers"](#) over the intended use of the device, forcing parents to lie about who is using the device. Overnight, voluntary transactions are turned criminal. A parent giving a smartphone to a child to call if in trouble, a tablet given to a cranky kid at a nice restaurant, or a wireless device used to conduct research online could all be criminal acts under the auspices of Initiative 29.

Parents and children all place unique and diverse values on connectivity, while this initiative looks to set a one size fits all negative value using the coercive enforcement power of the state. Parents are and always will be the best judge of values and needs for their children. Why then would any parent sign a petition demanding someone coerce their "natural" values on their wonderfully "un-natural" children?

Ya know what else idleness causes... Awful initiatives. Initiatives like Initiative 29.

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