

## FACTS: Reducing Digitally Altered Advertisements

Kids today are growing up in a digital world that bombards them with unrealistic and biased body and beauty ideals. The body and beauty ideals that are pushed online can lead to very real offline threats to the health of our youth – such as eating disorders and health dangers of underregulated weight-loss and muscle-building supplement use. Our kids need a new front line of defense to their health that stays ahead of these threats by tackling both *cause* and *effect* through state legislation.

### Reducing Digitally Altered Advertisements

#### Problem

- **Soaring media exposure.** Cultural ideals of beauty have long been influenced by media – yet kids today are much more exposed, spending an average of 7.5 hours per day on screens for entertainment.<sup>1</sup> Time spent on YouTube and other digital platforms has more than doubled in the last 5 years alone.<sup>2</sup>
- **Unrealistic images.** Photos can be digitally altered to slim waists, change skin tones, bulk up muscles, and erase blemishes. Digitally altered photos are rampant in sponsored posts from celebrities, YouTubers, and other social media influencers. Traditional advertisers – who widely use digitally altered photos – use these inexpensive channels to reach kids as well.<sup>3,4</sup>
- **Racially biased beauty ideals.** Advertisers commonly lighten a Black or Brown person’s skin, reinforcing to our kids the destructive and racist belief that lighter complexions are preferred over darker skin tones.<sup>5</sup>
- **Destructive health outcomes for kids, regardless of gender, race or sexual minority status.**
  - Exposure to unrealistic images of beauty has been shown to lead to body dissatisfaction, a risk factor for unhealthy weight control behaviors and eating disorders.<sup>6</sup>
  - This is far from a “girl problem.” Over 50% of teen girls and nearly 40% of teen boys reported unhealthy weight control behaviors in the past year, like taking diet pills, skipping meals, and smoking more cigarettes in order to lose weight.<sup>7</sup> Transgender young people also have higher risk for developing eating disorders than their cisgender peers.<sup>8,9</sup>
  - Black and Brown children are impacted by eating disorders in similar and sometimes higher rates as white children. For example, Latina adolescent girls are more likely than white girls to exhibit bulimic behavior, such as bingeing and purging, and boys of color across ethnic groups experience more bulimic behavior than do white boys.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Our state can help protect kids from this cause of mental health issues and unhealthy behaviors.**

- ✓ Our state can offer a tax incentive to cosmetic, apparel, and personal care product companies that pledge to *not digitally alter* skin tone, skin texture, body size, or body shape in their advertisements.
- ✓ Consumer research shows a positive response to unaltered ads, which would serve as an additional incentive to in-state companies.<sup>11</sup>
- ✓ While a tax incentive will not eliminate digitally altered ads, it can result in powerful new allies, create corporate models of social responsibility, heighten youth awareness of digital altering, and put pressure on advertisers and influencers to stop altering images.
- ✓ Legislation would meet the American Medical Association’s push for guidelines on these unhealthy advertising practices to protect children’s mental health.<sup>12</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Rideout, V., and Robb, M. B. (2019). *The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2019*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.
- <sup>2</sup> Rideout, V., and Robb, M. B. (2019). *The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2019*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.
- <sup>3</sup> McBride C, Costello N, Ambwani S, Wilhite B, Austin SB. Digital manipulation of images of models' appearance in mass media: Strategies for action through law and corporate social responsibility incentives to protect public health. *Am J Law Med.* 2019;45(1):7-31.
- <sup>4</sup> Erlanger S. Point, Shoot, Retouch and Label? *The New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/03/fashion/03Boyer.html>
- <sup>5</sup> McBride C, Costello N, Ambwani S, Wilhite B, Austin S. Digital manipulation of images of models' appearance in mass media: Strategies for action through law and corporate social responsibility incentives to protect public health. *Am J Law Med.* 2019;45(1):7-31.
- <sup>6</sup> Hausenblas HA, Campbell A, Menzel JE, Doughty J, Levine M, Thompson JK. Media effects of experimental presentation of the ideal physique on eating disorder symptoms: a meta-analysis of laboratory studies. *Clinical Psychology Review* 2013; 33(1): 168-181.
- <sup>7</sup> Haynos AF, Wall MM, Chen C, Wang SB, Loth K, Neumark-Sztainer D. Patterns of weight control behavior persisting beyond young adulthood: Results from a 15-year longitudinal study. *Int J Eat Disord.* 2018;51(9):1090-1097.
- <sup>8</sup> Diemer EW, Grant JD, Munn-Chernoff AM, Patterson DA, Duncan AE. Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Eating-Related Pathology in a National Sample of College Students. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2015; 57(2): 144-149.
- <sup>9</sup> Nagata JM, Ganson KT, Austin SB. Emerging trends in eating disorders among sexual and gender minorities. *Current Opinions in Psychiatry* 2020; 33(6): 562-567.
- <sup>10</sup> Beccia AL, Baek J, Jesdale WM, Austin SB, Forrester S, Curtin C, Lapane KL. Risk of disordered eating at the intersection of gender and racial/ethnic identity among U.S. high school students. *Journal of Eating Behavior* 2019; 34: 101299.
- <sup>11</sup> Rodgers RF, Kruger L, Lowy AS, Long S, Richard C. Getting Real about body image: A qualitative investigation of the usefulness of the Aerie Real campaign. *Body Image* 2019; 30: 127-134.
- <sup>12</sup> American Medical Association. AMA Adopts New Policies at Annual Meeting. Jun 21, 2011. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/ama-adopts-new-policies-at-annual-meeting-124303474.html>