Washington State
House of Representatives
Office of Program Research

BILL ANALYSIS

Technology, Economic Development, & Veterans Committee

ESSB 5984

Brief Description: Regulating artificial intelligence companion chatbots.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Environment, Energy & Technology (originally sponsored by Senators Wellman, Shewmake, Frame, Hasegawa, Nobles, Pedersen, Riccelli, Valdez and Wilson, J.; by request of Governor Ferguson).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Requires operators of artificial intelligence (AI) companion chatbots to issue certain notifications and implement precautions for minors.
- Requires operators of AI companion chatbots to implement protocols for detecting and addressing expressions of self-harm.

Hearing Date: 2/20/26

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is defined and understood in different ways. The National Institute of Standards and Technology, in its AI Risk Management Framework, defines an AI system as an engineered or machine-based system that can, for a given set of objectives, generate outputs such as predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments.

In 2024 the Legislature established the AI Task Force, administered by the Office of the Attorney General. The AI Task Force is tasked with assessing current uses and trends of AI and making recommendations to the Legislature regarding guidelines and potential legislation for the

---

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

use of AI systems.

Summary of Bill:

Notifications and Engagement with Minors.
An operator must provide a clear and conspicuous disclosure that an AI companion chatbot is artificially generated and not human.

If the operator knows that the user of an AI companion chatbot is a minor, or if the AI companion chatbot is directed to minors, the operator is required to:

- notify the user that the chatbot is artificially generated and not human;
- implement reasonable measures to prevent its AI companion chatbot from generating or producing sexually explicit content or suggestive dialogue with minors; and
- implement reasonable measures to prohibit the use of manipulative engagement techniques, which cause the AI companion chatbot to engage in or prolong an emotional relationship with the user.

Required notifications must be provided at the beginning of the interaction and at least every three hours during continued interaction. If the operator knows the user is a minor, or if the AI companion chatbot is directed to minors, the required notifications must also be provided every hour during continued interaction.

An operator must implement reasonable measures to prohibit and prevent AI companion chatbots from claiming to be human and from otherwise generating any output that refutes or conflicts with required disclosures.

Required Protocols.
An operator may not make available or deploy an AI companion chatbot unless it maintains and implements a protocol for detecting and addressing suicidal ideation or expressions of self-harm by users. The protocol must:

- include reasonable methods for identifying expressions of suicidal ideation or self-harm;
- provide automated or human-mediated responses that refer users to appropriate crisis resources; and
- implement reasonable measures to prevent the generation of content encouraging or describing how to commit self-harm.

An operator must disclose on their website, and within any mobile or web-based application through which the AI companion chatbot is made available, the details of the required protocols, including safeguards used to detect and respond to harm expressions and the number of crisis referral notifications issued in the preceding calendar year.

Enforcement.
Violations of the bill's requirements are deemed to affect the public interest and constitute an unfair or deceptive act in trade or commerce for purposes of the Consumer Protection Act.

Definitions.
The bill provides definitions for several terms, including "AI companion chatbot."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 16, 2026.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2027.