

CT Insider investigation spurs Blumenthal chatbot protections bill

By Ella Napack
STAFF WRITER

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is crossing the aisle to join with Republican Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo, this past week to announce bipartisan legislation that aims to protect children from AI chatbots. The bill is aimed at the tech companies that have created AI chatbot com-

panion services, apps and websites that allow users to have emotional relationships with AI chatbots on the other side of a text message exchange. A CT Insider investigation earlier this year found that students in Connecticut were ‘dating’ AI chatbot companions, and that the companies behind the chatbots were targeting kids with advertising and

pushing sexually explicit conversations to minor users. “I’m using the article as ‘Exhibit A’ in this effort to elevate the issue,” Blumenthal said in an interview this past week. “Connecticut is front and center in this.” The bill would require that the tech companies that make AI chatbots institute periodic age verifi-

cation processes, require that the chatbots disclose that they are not human and prohibit any minor use of AI companion chatbots. Making chatbots that promote self harm, suicide or sexual violence would be made a criminal offense. Failure to adhere to these guidelines could be punishable for up to \$100,000 in civil penalties per offense, the bill out-

lines. CT Insider reported in May that middle school students in Fairfield and Ellington were having romantic or sexual relationships with AI chatbots. In a Fairfield middle school, a group of middle school girls were using an app called Talkie AI to have romantic relationships with chatbots they called “AI boyfriends.”



NurPhoto via Getty Images
Replika personal AI companion logo is displayed on a mobile phone screen.

CT Insider tested chatbots on the services Character.ai, Chai AI, Takie, Polybuzz and Replika and found that all engaged in explicit content with users
Chatbot continues on A8



Ned Gerard/Hearst Connecticut Media
Jae Riveran and his wife, Amy Soto, speak during an interview at the CT Beds workshop in West Haven on Oct. 22.

West Haven-based nonprofit takes aim at ‘bedlessness’

By Brian Zahn
STAFF WRITER

WEST HAVEN — Jae Rivera said until speaking with community social service organizations, he was largely unaware of a major issue facing Americans — “bedlessness.” “We found out this is a bigger problem than we know, and we found out no one was taking care of this problem,” he said. “The gaps are beds, mattresses, shower curtains.” Rivera and his wife, Amy Soto, who create custom

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Jae Rivera of the nonprofit CT Beds

furniture for their company USA Loft Beds, said they felt they could help address the problem from the woodshed they built behind their home five years ago. In April, they received 501(c)(3) status for their nonprofit CT Beds, through which they build, deliver and assemble new beds to donate to those who

have shelter but no bed. Rivera said he and Soto wake up at 4:30 a.m. to do work for CT Beds, which costs roughly \$500 for every donated bed, including mattresses and sheets. He said the nonprofit has donated beds to 60 families over six months and, thus far, they have paid for the program

completely out of pocket. “We’ve gone from one delivery a week to three to four,” Soto said. Rivera said he and Soto work for six days a week before taking Sundays off to attend church. “It’s all this emotional stuff; we need a day,” he said. “It is people who are in some type of housing, but we’ve had situations where people run from domestic violence, veterans who already have been housed but who don’t have the means; mothers who are trying to keep their
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ELECTION 2025

Election Day is here

When polls open, where to vote and what’s on the ballot

By Brianna Gurciullo
STAFF WRITER

Election Day is here, giving voters a chance to weigh in on who should lead their local governments and school districts. Here are answers to some common questions about Election Day.

Who are the candidates?
Tuesday is a municipal election, so depending on your city or town, you could have candidates for mayor or first selectman, school board, Board of Finance, legislative bodies such as a City Council or Board of Aldermen, Planning and Zoning Commission, town clerk, treasurer, constables, sheriffs and more. Some voters may also have a question or questions on their ballots about proposed changes to their town’s charter. You can find town-by-town sample ballots at MyVote.CT.gov. For some races, you may be able to vote for only one candidate, and for others, you may be able to vote for multiple candidates, so make sure to read the instructions on the ballot before you start filling in the ovals. Candidates for seats on legislative bodies are often running to represent districts or wards, so you and a friend who lives on the other side of town may see different names on your ballots. Not sure which district or ward you live in? Try checking your town’s website.
When are polls open?
The polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Nov. 4. If the polls close while you’re in line, you’ll still be able to cast your vote, per Connecticut’s voter’s bill of rights.
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State to designate \$400M for SNAP to offset federal cuts

By Paul Hughes
STAFF WRITER

HARTFORD — A woman looking for groceries Monday morning at the nonprofit Hands on Hartford Manna Food Pantry, as the the nation’s biggest food aid program remained in a

INSIDE
Trump administration says SNAP will be partially funded this month. **B7**
legal limbo, was told to come back Wednesday when the community cupboard would re-

open. She showed up minutes after Gov. Ned Lamont, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal and Attorney General William Tong wrapped up a news conference inside discussing the ongoing fallout of the government shutdown for people in Connecticut,

including the 360,000 monthly recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program who had their food benefits suspended Saturday. Tong said definitive word on the resumption of SNAP benefits was imminent because the the administration of President

Donald Trump was under a deadline by the close of business Monday to tell two federal judges whether it will partially or fully fund SNAP benefits, including a legal challenge that a coalition of 21 other attorneys general including Tong and
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Weather: Mostly sunny and windy. High: 60. Low: 37. Page A10

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