News



The U.S. Capitol building is seen as Reps. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., and Katherine Clark, D-Mass., walk down its steps in Washington Sept. 16, 2026.
(OSV News/Reuters/Aaron Schwartz)

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More than a dozen U.S. bishops met with members of Congress on Sept. 16 to urge lawmakers to enact effective safety guardrails on artificial intelligence and to advocate for the passage of a bill that aims to protect children online.

The meetings came the same day the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced a new task force to engage with tech leaders and lawmakers to discuss their concerns about AI, human dignity, and online child safety.

Archbishop Alexander Sample of Portland, Oregon, chair of the U.S. bishops' conference religious liberty committee, told OSV News in an interview that day near the Capitol that after the bishops' administrative committee meeting, "We just took the opportunity of being here in Washington, D.C., to visit with some of the senators and the representatives about the pressing issues that are on the minds and the hearts of the bishops."

After multiple tech leaders called for a slowdown in AI development to establish safety guardrails, debate on Capitol Hill emerged about how to respond. President Donald Trump has largely rejected these concerns around AI, taking a bullish position on the advancement of the technology, arguing that failing to do so would leave the U.S. playing catch up with China.

In Congress, some Republicans have spoken affirmatively of Trump's position, calling on tech leaders to self-regulate their AI efforts, while some Democrats have called for AI regulations.

Earlier this year, Pope Leo XVI called for "adequate regulatory tools capable of upholding justice and curbing the distorting effects of technological power" in his encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which addresses the challenges of AI.

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But the bishops' meetings took place on a busy day at the Capitol, as lawmakers prepared to leave town with no plans to return until after the November elections.

Addressing the emerging differences of opinion among lawmakers about AI technology, Sample said, "There's a sense of urgency to this, because the tech experts themselves told us, this morning, that the next 12-18 months is going to see tremendous advancements."

"We understand there's a hesitancy — a political hesitancy — to move on any kind of legislation with some guardrails," he said. "You know, we want both houses of the Congress to work together with the administration to develop some guardrails."

Acknowledging "the global climate," he argued that cooperation should also take place among countries as well.

Sample also told OSV News that the bishops advocated for Congress to pass the Kids Online Safety Act (S.1748). The House passed a version of legislation earlier this year, but the Senate's version includes a "duty of care" provision that was not included in the House bill. The White House has negotiated with senators on that bill.

Placing the burden of duty of care on developers, Sample said, would ensure they have the "responsibility to make sure that there's protections for children."

"Because we know how much harm, certainly, can be done to children on the internet, and so it's an effort to enact legislation that will keep our young people safe online," he said.

Sample said that the bishops are also concerned about the impact on workers. But more broadly, he added, "We're speaking to the representatives and senators not as experts, but as pastors."

"We want to make sure that as AI develops and progresses, that there's always the respect for the dignity of the human person, the protection of life," he said.