

Family of child injured in Canada school shooting sues OpenAI

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Technology reporter

 AFP via Getty Images

The family of a girl critically injured during a mass shooting at a Canadian school is **suing ChatGPT-maker OpenAI**, claiming it had been aware the suspect had been planning an attack but failed to alert the authorities.

Twelve-year-old Maya Gebala was **shot in the neck and head** in the attack in Tumbler Ridge on 10 February and remains in hospital.

An initial ChatGPT account linked to the suspect, 18-year-old Jesse Van Rootselaar, was banned by OpenAI in June 2025 due to the nature of her conversations with the chatbot, but Canadian police were not notified.

OpenAI told the BBC it was committed to making "meaningful changes" to help prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Eight people were killed in the attack, including five young children and the suspect's mother, in one of the deadliest shootings in Canadian history.

The civil lawsuit, brought by Gebala's mother Cia Edmonds, alleges Rootselaar set up an account with ChatGPT before she turned 18 - something users can do with parental consent.

The plaintiffs allege no age verification took place on the site.

The lawsuit claims the suspect saw the chatbot as a "trusted confidante" and described "various scenarios involving gun violence" to it over several days in late spring or early summer 2025.

Twelve OpenAI employees then reportedly flagged the posts as "indicating an imminent risk of serious harm to others" and recommended Canadian law enforcement was informed, the lawsuit alleges.

Instead, it is alleged the request to contact the authorities was "rebuffed" and the only action taken was to ban Rootselaar's account.

OpenAI has **previously said** it did not alert police because the account did not meet its threshold of a credible or imminent plan for serious physical harm to others.

The suspect was able to then open a second ChatGPT account, despite being flagged by OpenAI systems in the past, and "continue planning scenarios involving gun violence".

The lawsuit claims the company "had specific knowledge of the shooter's long-range planning of a mass casualty event," but "took no steps to act upon this knowledge".

The plaintiffs state as a result of the company's conduct, Gebala, who was shot at three times after trying to lock a library door to keep out the shooter, has suffered a "catastrophic brain injury".

OpenAI's response

In a statement to the BBC, an OpenAI spokesperson called the events an "unspeakable tragedy", adding its thoughts remained with the victims, their families and the community.

"OpenAI remains committed to working with government and law enforcement officials to make meaningful changes that help prevent tragedies like this in the future," a spokesperson said.

On 4 March, the CEO of OpenAI, Sam Altman, virtually met Canada's artificial intelligence minister, Evan Solomon, and the premier of British Columbia, David Eby.

According to the Wall Street Journal, Altman "pledged to strengthen protocols on notifying police over potentially harmful interactions" and to apologise to the Tumbler Ridge community.

In an open letter to Canadian officials on 26 February, penned by OpenAI's vice-president of global policy and shared with media outlets, the company said it had implemented a series of changes in recent months, including enlisting the help of "mental health and behavioural experts" to assess cases and making the criteria for referral to police "more flexible".

Because of the changes, OpenAI said it would have reported the suspect's ChatGPT account under the new guidelines.

"We commit to strengthening our detection systems to better prevent attempts to evade our safeguards and prioritize identifying the highest risk offenders," the company wrote.

OpenAI said it would also establish a direct point of contact with Canadian law enforcement so it can quickly flag any possible future cases with "potential for real world violence".

Canada's AI minister Evan Solomon said on 27 February that while legislators saw a willingness by the tech firm to improve its protocols, "we have not yet seen a detailed plan for how these commitments will be implemented in practice".

OpenAI vows safety policy changes after Tumbler Ridge shooting

Who were the victims of the shootings in Tumbler Ridge, Canada?

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