

NEWS

# Twitter refused to remove child porn because it didn't 'violate policies': lawsuit

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Twitter refused to take down widely shared pornographic images and videos of a teenage sex trafficking victim because an investigation "didn't find a violation" of the company's "policies," a scathing lawsuit alleges.

The federal suit, filed Wednesday by the victim and his mother in the Northern District of California, alleges Twitter made money off the clips, which showed a 13-year-old engaged in sex acts and are a form of child sexual abuse material, or child porn, the suit states.

The teen — who is now 17 and lives in Florida — is identified only as John Doe and was between 13 and 14 years old when sex traffickers, posing as a 16-year-old female classmate, started chatting with him on Snapchat, the suit alleges.

Doe and the traffickers allegedly exchanged nude photos before the conversation turned to blackmail: If the teen didn't share more sexually graphic photos and videos, the explicit material he'd already sent would be shared with his "parents, coach, pastor" and others,

the suit states.

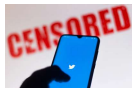
Doe, acting under duress, initially complied and sent videos of himself performing sex acts and was also told to include another child in his videos, which he did, the suit claims.

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Eventually, Doe blocked the traffickers and they stopped harassing him, but at some point in 2019, the videos surfaced on Twitter under two accounts that were known to share child sexual abuse material, court papers allege.

Over the next month, the videos would be reported to Twitter at least three times — first on Dec. 25, 2019 — but the tech giant failed to do anything about it until a federal law enforcement officer got involved, the suit states.

Doe became aware of the tweets in January 2020 because they'd been viewed widely by his classmates, which subjected him to “teasing, harassment, vicious bullying” and led him to become “suicidal,” court records show.

While Doe's parents contacted the school and made police reports, he filed a complaint with Twitter, saying there were two tweets depicting child pornography of himself and they needed to be removed because they were illegal, harmful and were in violation of the site's policies.



Getty Images

A support agent followed up and asked for a copy of Doe's ID so they could prove it was him and after the teen complied, there was no response for a week, the family claims.

Around the same time, Doe's mother filed two complaints to Twitter reporting the same material and for a week, she also received no response, the suit states.

Finally on Jan. 28, Twitter replied to Doe and said they wouldn't be taking down the material, which had already racked up over 167,000 views and 2,223 retweets, the suit states.

"Thanks for reaching out. We've reviewed the content, and didn't find a violation of our policies, so no action will be taken at this time," the response reads, according to the lawsuit.

"If you believe there's a potential copyright infringement, please start a new report. If the content is hosted on a third-party website, you'll need to contact that website's support team to report it. Your safety is the most important thing, and if you believe you are in danger, we encourage you to contact your local authorities."

In his response, published in the complaint, Doe appeared shocked.

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"What do you mean you don't see a problem? We both are minors right now and were minors at the time these videos were taken. We both were 13 years of age. We were baited, harassed, and threatened to take these videos that are now being posted without our

permission. We did not authorize these videos AT ALL and they need to be taken down,” the teen wrote back to Twitter.

He even included his case number from a local law enforcement agency, but still the tech giant allegedly ignored him and refused to do anything about the illegal child sexual abuse material — as it continued to rack up more and more views.

Two days later, Doe’s mom was connected with an agent from the Department of Homeland Security through a mutual contact who successfully had the videos removed on Jan. 30, the suit states.

“Only after this take-down demand from a federal agent did Twitter suspend the user accounts that were distributing the CSAM and report the CSAM to the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children,” states the suit, filed by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation and two law firms.

“This is directly in contrast to what their automated reply message and User Agreement state they will do to protect children.”

The disturbing lawsuit goes on to allege Twitter knowingly hosts creeps who use the platform to exchange child porn material and profits from it by including ads interspersed between tweets advertising or requesting the material.

Early Thursday, Twitter declined comment to The Post but later in the day, reversed course and sent a statement by email.

“Twitter has zero-tolerance for any material that features or promotes child sexual exploitation. We aggressively fight online child sexual abuse and have heavily invested in technology and tools to enforce our policy, a Twitter spokesperson wrote.

“Our dedicated teams work to stay ahead of bad-faith actors and to ensure we’re doing everything we can to remove content, facilitate investigations, and protect minors from harm — both on and offline.”