

March 24, 2021

Dear Chairman Pallone, Chairwoman Schakowksy, and Members of of the House Energy and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to you, exasperated by the inaction or lack of sufficient action by social media platforms, in stopping the spread of disinformation and hate on their platforms. We are writing to you as direct survivors of the hate, lies and incitement to violence that have been allowed to reach millions of people online, and gravely harm many lives offline, including ours and those of our families, patients and communities. The decisions and choices that Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Dorsey, and Sundar Pichai have made or approved in building Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, respectively, have allowed bad actors to weaponize social media platforms, spread misinformation, and cause harm to our nation's democracy, to each of us, our families, and communities, and to millions of people across the country and around the world.

Ultimately, we write to you because **you, as our elected officials, have the power and responsibility to fix this**. For far too long, tech companies have been allowed to make decisions about their platforms guided primarily by their business models. As your constituents, we ask that you rein in their power by adopting smart tech regulation that places human lives first and holds tech companies responsible and accountable for their decisions.

We bring you our stories, and urge you to listen to the pain, death, and disease these platforms have directly contributed to.

- **We are doctors in Pennsylvania and New York who are struggling to counter the spread of disinformation about Covid-19 on Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Twitter.** We constantly hear from patients and co-workers who cite social media posts claiming that masks don't work in preventing the spread of Covid-19, that we health care workers are lying about the pandemic, that the vaccines are dangerous and ineffective - and unfortunately so much more. Misinformation about science and health has resulted in many deaths and will continue to cause pain and suffering if your platforms do not actively and persistently crackdown on this harmful content.
- **We are parents of autistic children in North Carolina and Florida who spend hours countering dangerous misinformation about miracle cures for autism on Facebook and Instagram.** Hundreds and thousands of children are being subjected to charlatans who spread misinformation through Facebook groups. These individuals claim that giving autistic children bleach, turpentine, Chelation, and other harmful and deadly chemicals will cure them of their autism. We have repeatedly reported this dangerous content to Facebook content moderators to no avail, Facebook's algorithms continue to show disinformation about autism to users, Facebook's ad policy preventing targeting based on disability remains unenforced, and in at least one case we've documented, Facebook has taken ad money for an event explicitly spreading autism misinformation.
- **My daughter was killed in the Parkland school shooting and my family in Florida was aggressively stalked and harassed by an Instagram user.** Even though the individual is now serving a multi-year prison sentence and was deemed to present a credible threat to me and my family, Instagram refused to cooperate with law enforcement officials until they secured a search warrant. The individual destroyed my wife and my son emotionally for the better part of several weeks.
- **My daughter was killed in Virginia on live television and Facebook, Google and YouTube have failed to remove footage of her murder from their platforms.** The recording of my daughter's murder continues to proliferate online and I have spent 5 years working to get this footage removed. YouTube and Facebook continue to profit from my daughter's murder.
- **I ran for local office in Alabama and those who wanted me to lose used Facebook groups to spread lies and disinformation about me and my family.** Facebook empowered my political opponents to establish local group pages that spread misinformation about my views and painted me as an angry Black woman seeking to divide our small town. People I've known my entire life stopped talking to me. What happened here is just a microcosm of what's happening all across our country. January 6th was a sad day, but it's been happening all over the nation.

- **I'm the pastor of a Black church in Washington D.C. that was defaced by extremists who organized on Facebook and other social media platforms.** The Proud Boys used Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms to organize and build power, eventually destroying a Black Lives Matter sign from a Black church in an effort to intimidate our congregants. It was an act of political violence by people who were mobilized and rallied others using technology platforms. This isn't about free speech. This is about human lives being protected, about people being able to live in this nation freely.
- **My partner was killed in Kenosha, Wisconsin by an armed teenager who associated with the Proud Boys.** The Kenosha Guard event page on Facebook that served as a call to arms globally, and incited the civilian militia in Kenosha to show up at a peaceful protest in the wake of Jacob Blake's shooting was flagged 455 times by Facebook users but was not taken down.
- **I lost my father to baseless Qanon conspiracy theories on YouTube.** When Covid hit, he believed the videos more than his own child. As of writing this, it's been a month since he's said a word to me. Though I've lived at home as his caregiver for years, I don't recognize the person in dad's chair.

Social media may have been created to connect people and make our worlds bigger. But as our stories indicate, the world is now more hate-filled and divided as a result of business decisions these tech companies have made. In the same way that a company that pollutes our air and water must be held accountable for its actions, these social media platforms must be held accountable for creating products designed to pollute our society and our communities with dangerous misinformation.

And we are not alone. Indeed, a movement of survivors of tech harm is growing, and a national chorus of voices coming together with a unified message to Congress: Stop letting big tech off the hook. Protect your constituents. Regulate tech platforms now.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and to more fully share our experiences of being harmed by social media platforms.

Sincerely,

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