



June 22, 2020

Hon. Mike Doyle
Chairman, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
306 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Janice Schakowsky
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2367 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Robert E. Latta
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2467 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
1035 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Statement for the Record

**By Brenda Victoria Castillo President & CEO, National Hispanic Media Coalition
Joint Hearing: A Country in Crisis: How Disinformation Online Is Dividing the Nation**

Dear Chairman Doyle, Chairwoman Schakowsky, Ranking Member Latta, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and the Honorable Members of the House Subcommittees on Communications and Technology and Consumer Protection and Commerce,

The National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) applauds the Committee for holding a hearing to evaluate the state of disinformation and online hate during the COVID-19 pandemic and the uprising of the Movement for Black Lives and racial justice. NHMC was founded thirty



four years ago specifically to combat hate in the media. For over three decades, our team has fought tirelessly on the front lines to dismantle white supremacy and push for accurate representation of the Latinx community.

Today, hate has escalated to online platforms, and so too has our work. NHMC, on its own and as a founding member of Change the Terms, actively pursues accountability from big tech companies like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and Tik Tok. As advocates for the safety and protected rights of the Latinx community online, we believe these companies are not doing enough to stop, demonetize, demote, ban, and deplatform hate and disinformation.

Hate and disinformation are thriving online as a result of platform inaction, and thus continue dividing our country and threatening the safety of our future generations. Disinformation interferes with the integrity of our elections, specifically targeting marginalized groups and swing districts.¹ It fuels voter suppression by spreading false information about voting times and locations, targeted to communities of color and perpetuating hate and violence. Particularly, as we witness how disinformation about the movement fans the flames of white supremacy. These targeted lies have been used as a weapon for silencing our voices, distorting our stories, and erasing our culture and humanity. Pointing specifically to the Trump administration creating a false perception on immigration and getting caught using an image of Morocco's border being rushed by immigrants.² He chose to use this moment of chaos to discredit Latinx immigrants and change the reality of the situation. This purposeful dehumanization of the Latinx community for political gain, among many other examples of hate and disinformation, is one of the many reasons we demand change.

¹ Mie Kim, Y. (n.d.). Voter Suppression Has Gone Digital. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/voter-suppression-has-gone-digital>.

² Collins, E. (2016, January 04). Trump ad uses footage from Morocco, not Mexican border. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/01/donald-trump-ad-footage-border-morocco-217332>.



We are encouraged through the actions taken by companies, like Twitter, who have taken a stand against Trump and his Administration's war on the truth. Their willingness to check our government officials when the information they disseminate is counterproductive to the livelihood of our communities is a promising first step in the fight for accountability. Twitter has embarked on a process of fact-checking to make sure that their consumers are consuming accurate information, and that they are warned when the integrity of content is in question. The Trump administration's reaction to this step towards accountability is an unlawful Executive Order that limits the ability of social media companies to continue making much-needed progress against hate and disinformation. We ask for lawmakers to do more to bridge the gap of distrust for consumers, 80% of whom do not trust social media companies to make the right decisions about what people can say or post on their websites, by siding with truth rather than allowing factless posts to hold weight online.³

While we commend Twitter, we know their recent actions are far from what we are accustomed to seeing from the tech industry. Unfortunately, we continue to be disappointed with Facebook and the company's refusal to do more against hate-speech and disinformation—particularly when that hate and disinformation is being spread by politicians.⁴ Just last week, Facebook took down a Trump campaign ad that featured a Nazi concentration camp symbol,⁵ yet the platform continuously allows the Trump campaign to advertise and post disinformation without being fact-checked. Facebook has adopted a hands-off policy and in doing so they are neglecting the real life harms that come from disinformation.⁶ We also point to

³ The Knight Foundation. (2020, June). The future of tech policy: American views. (2020). Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/the-future-of-tech-policy-american-views/>.

⁴ McCarthy, T. (2020, May 28). Zuckerberg says Facebook won't be 'arbiters of truth' after Trump threat. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/28/zuckerberg-facebook-police-online-speech-trump>

⁵ Ghosh, S. (2020, June 19). After 4 years of timidity, Facebook and Twitter are finally taking basic steps to curb Trump's worst instincts. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://news.yahoo.com/4-years-timidity-facebook-twitter-112838950.html>.

⁶ Isaac, M., & Kang, C. (2020, January 09). Facebook Says It Won't Back Down From Allowing Lies in Political Ads. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/09/technology/facebook-political-ads-lies.html>.



Pinterest, who have been able to maintain the facade of support for the Black Lives Matter movement, but do little to support its employees of color and limit the racist content that is being shared on its platform.⁷ We refuse to settle for performative support, and demand that social media companies do more to ensure that their consumers are safe and heard.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that online platforms indeed do have the ability to moderate content for public health reasons, demonstrated by their collective, strategic effort to identify and take down misinformation. The actions by big tech companies to take action against the dangers of the rapid spread of false information prove that, even with reduced content moderation team capacity during a pandemic, it is possible to reduce the harms of disinformation. Unfortunately, this same collective, strategic effort has not been mirrored for the identification and take down for the misinformation movements spreading hate and bigotry in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the uprising of the Movement for Black Lives. This further emphasizes the existing sentiment of our communities: big tech will only take swift action for public health when it affects its white user base, and not when it affects the health and well being of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of color.

Policies and public statements of solidarity against racism and hate are not enough. Many big tech companies have robust, public policies and commitments, but continue to enforce those policies in an unjust and inconsistent manner, harming communities of color. The battle against hate and disinformation online is not just about overt racism or false information. So much of the content that harms and dehumanizes our people fall into “gray areas” and thus are allowed to remain online and reach unlimited audiences. This parallels the harm done by stereotypes and microaggressions, subtle in their racist or discriminatory undertones, in our lives offline.

⁷ Bort, J. (2020, June 15). 2 Black women publicly resigned from Pinterest, saying they faced humiliation and retaliation and were passed over for promotion. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/two-black-women-publicly-explain-why-they-resigned-from-pinterest-2020-6>



In this moment, we have an opportunity to build anti-racism into all of our systems and infrastructures, including social media content moderation. NHMC is committed to exploring policy, legislative, and partnership solutions to drive accountability for all stakeholders involved, and sincerely appreciates the Committee's efforts to address disinformation during the current crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brenda Victoria Castillo', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Brenda Victoria Castillo
President & CEO
National Hispanic Media Coalition
bcastillo@nhmc.org