

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 24, 2020

Mark Zuckerberg  
Chief Executive Officer  
Facebook  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to urge you to address concerns over the proliferation of hate speech and white supremacy across your platform, as well as the lack of racial and ethnic diversity within your company.

As the country reckons with the twin pandemics of the novel coronavirus and civil rights injustice, it is more important than ever that companies like Facebook reflect values like justice and equality. These values are necessary for our society to heal from the injustices experienced by Black Americans every day, including police violence and the health disparities made clear by the coronavirus that devastate Black and minority communities.<sup>1</sup> Each day, millions of Americans rely on Facebook to communicate with family and friends, organize groups of people, share information widely with a push of a button, and advocate for issues of importance. Given the role that Facebook now plays in our society, the company must pay the highest level of attention over how its platform is used, while responding with thoughtful and responsible action. Further, Facebook has a responsibility to take meaningful steps to ensure that the company itself reflects the racial diversity of the country so that the company has a diversity of perspectives in making decisions large and small.

Though Congress and civil rights organizations have implored the company to do so in the past, Facebook has yet to truly accept the role the company plays in facilitating racist speech, racist violence, and the organization of hate groups online. This hateful activity online has devastating offline impacts on individuals and communities who are targeted. Facebook must not only acknowledge this role, but it must take concerted efforts to address these concerns. We were heartened when Facebook committed over two years ago to a civil rights audit of the company.<sup>2</sup> It suggested Facebook would finally embrace the kind of corporate responsibility necessary for a company with the societal role that Facebook plays to embrace its role in promoting a just and prosperous society. However, the “third and final report” promised during the “first half of 2020”

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<sup>1</sup> NPR, *What Do Coronavirus Racial Disparities Look Like State-by-State?* (May 30, 2020) ([www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/05/30/865413079/what-do-coronavirus-racial-disparities-look-like-state-by-state](http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/05/30/865413079/what-do-coronavirus-racial-disparities-look-like-state-by-state)).

<sup>2</sup> Axios, *Exclusive: Facebook Commits to Civil Rights Audit, Political Bias Review* (May 2, 2018) ([www.axios.com/scoop-facebook-committing-to-internal-pobias-audit-1525187977-160aaa3a-3d10-4b28-a4bb-b81947bd03e4.html](http://www.axios.com/scoop-facebook-committing-to-internal-pobias-audit-1525187977-160aaa3a-3d10-4b28-a4bb-b81947bd03e4.html)).

has not yet been released,<sup>3</sup> and there has not been a public update about the audit in nearly a year.<sup>4</sup> Among the recommendations that have been released, of particular note is the auditor’s opinion that the company’s approach to white supremacy is “still too narrow”<sup>5</sup>—despite Facebook’s purported ban on white supremacy.<sup>6</sup>

While we have grave concerns about how your platform is being used to foster hate, we are equally concerned that you and other members of the company’s leadership are not taking that concern seriously nor acting in ways that could minimize or eliminate systemic racism both within your company and on your platforms. Last fall, 46 civil rights groups wrote your company to express their concerns and disappointment, acknowledging that while some progress has been made, they have lost trust in the company and are concerned that Facebook “continues to act with reckless disregard for civil rights.”<sup>7</sup> More recently, after you had a call with civil rights leaders about the amplification on your platform of the President’s calls for violence against protestors, those leaders said they were “disappointed and stunned” with the company’s response.<sup>8</sup> Facebook employees, of which only 3.8 percent identify as Black, are similarly exasperated with the company’s approach to civil rights and unwillingness to listen to Black voices and other voices of color, leading some Facebook employees to stage a highly publicized “virtual protest.”<sup>9</sup>

Given the questionable history of the company on these matters, we lack faith that Facebook will use this and the previous two audits to take meaningful actions to make structural changes so the company can improve civil rights and equity. We take seriously the commitments you made recently to your employees and to the public to review certain content policies and explore new ideas for advancing the cause of racial justice.<sup>10</sup> But reviewing policies and exploring ideas cannot be the end of your work—you must take concrete steps to realize your vision that your platforms “play a positive role in helping to heal the divisions in our society.”<sup>11</sup> Let us be clear, as Members of Congress, we will neither forget nor stop our oversight.

The public deserves to know what concrete actions Facebook has taken and will take to address these concerns. Please provide responses to the following questions:

1. Will the third report mark the end of Facebook’s civil rights audit? If so, please provide detailed plans and metrics the company will use to ensure that systemic reforms to address civil rights issues are identified and implemented.

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<sup>3</sup> Facebook, *Facebook’s Civil Right Audit—Progress Report* (June 30, 2019) ([about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/civilrightaudit\\_final.pdf](https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/civilrightaudit_final.pdf)).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Facebook Bans White Nationalism and Separatism Content from Its Platforms*, NPR (Mar. 27, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, et al. to Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Facebook (Oct. 21, 2019) (<https://civilrights.org/resource/letter-urging-facebook-to-protect-civil-rights/>).

<sup>8</sup> CNBC, *Civil Rights Leaders Say They’re ‘Disappointed and Stunned’ After Call with Zuckerberg and Sandberg* (June 2, 2020) ([www.cnbc.com/2020/06/02/civil-rights-leaders-stunned-after-call-with-zuckerberg.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/02/civil-rights-leaders-stunned-after-call-with-zuckerberg.html)).

<sup>9</sup> CNBC, *Facebook Has a ‘Black Person Problem,’ Says Former Employee Who Quit This Month* (Nov. 27, 2018) ([www.cnbc.com/2018/11/27/facebook-has-black-people-problem-mark-luckie-former-employee.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/27/facebook-has-black-people-problem-mark-luckie-former-employee.html)); *Facebook Employees Stage a Virtual Protest*, New York Times (June 1, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Wall Street Journal, *Facebook to Review Content Policies Related to Civil Unrest, Violence* (June 5, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> [www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/i-just-shared-the-following-note-with-our-employees-and-i-want-to-share-it-with-10111985969467901/](https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/i-just-shared-the-following-note-with-our-employees-and-i-want-to-share-it-with-10111985969467901/).

2. What actions has Facebook taken in response to the recommendations made in the two previous reports of its civil rights audit?
  - a. In particular, have you followed prior audit recommendations with respect to hate speech enforcement, harassment, the definition of national origin, and your appeals process?
  - b. Has Facebook updated its policy toward white supremacy and separatist content as recommended by the second audit report? If so, how did it change the policy, and if it did not take action, why not?
3. In their October 2019 letter, civil rights organizations urged Facebook to make several structural changes to better protect civil rights, particularly if the civil rights audit comes to a close. For each of the recommendations below, indicate whether Facebook will commit to implement the recommendation, the action(s) Facebook will take to implement the recommendation, and the date by which such action(s) will be implemented. If Facebook will not commit to implement the recommendation, please provide a reason for that decision.
  - a. *Publicly name, hire, and staff an office of civil rights that will review and test all new products and policies. The office must be led by a C-Suite level officer responsible for, and with extensive expertise in, civil rights.*
  - b. *Install an independent and permanent civil rights ombudsman office that reports directly to the Board of Directors.*
  - c. *Diversify the Board of Directors and include candidates with civil rights experience.*
  - d. *Thoroughly test new products and policies by consulting with civil rights experts and thoroughly vetting products and policies internally for civil rights injuries before they are released.*
4. Will Facebook commit to take affirmative steps to provide factual information and/or label or remove posts when the platform is used for voter suppression and disinformation?
5. Will Facebook commit to take affirmative steps to direct users to more verified sources of information after they have engaged with voter suppression and disinformation campaigns, or hateful activity and incitement to racist violence, like steps the company has taken in response to rampant sharing of false and harmful information about the coronavirus?
6. In 2019, Facebook announced that it plans to double the number of Black and Hispanic employees in the United States within five years. What concrete steps has the company taken to meet this goal? What actions will Facebook take in the future to increase the number of persons of color it attracts, recruits, retains, and promotes for employment both across the company and for senior executive positions?

Please provide a response to these questions by July 15, 2020.

Sincerely,



LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER  
Member of Congress

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