

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 15, 2021

Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1601 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write regarding reports that Facebook has conducted and reviewed research showing that Instagram, the photo-sharing social media app that Facebook owns, is harmful to young people. This new information is particularly concerning given your company's recent announcement that it is "exploring" plans to launch a new version of Instagram for users under the age of 13.¹ In light of this new evidence, we strongly urge you to cease all efforts to launch any new platforms for children or teens.

According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, Facebook has conducted empirical research pointing to a connection between Instagram use and mental health problems among young users. Although you have publicly told Congress that "the research [I have] seen is that using social apps to connect with other people can have positive mental-health benefits," your own company's research points to disturbing relationships between Instagram use and young people's mental health challenges.² For example, according to internal Facebook documents obtained and published by the *Wall Street Journal*, your own research produced the following findings:

- six percent of U.S. teen users who have reported experiencing suicidal thoughts connect their inclination to end their lives to Instagram;
- Instagram exacerbates body image problems for one in three teen girls;
- young Instagram users feel social pressure to spend time on the app, even though they know it poses risks to their mental health;
- one in five teens reports that Instagram makes them feel worse about themselves; and
- many teens who battle mental health problems report that using Instagram makes them feel worse, highlighting "pressure to match the money and body shapes of influencers,"

¹ Ryan Mac & Craig Silverman, *Facebook Is Building An Instagram For Kids Under The Age Of 13*, BuzzFeed News (Mar. 18, 2021), https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/facebook-instagram-for-children-under13?mkt_tok=ODUwLVRBQS01MTEAAAF76Wa7gepI39A5wVIUsYMz6f2GDv9g1rWiYmtOIC3NziizWuTzJCaIshU83fHU8tA19vVmx76IsbdGFY1iCyJpXpjzYB92I0S_GJGy5tDrIhYb.

² Georgia Wells, Jeff Horwitz and Deepa Seetharaman, *Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show*, Wall St. J. (Sept. 14, 2021), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>.

over-sexualization of girls,” and “inappropriate advertisements targeted to vulnerable groups,” among the top ways the platform harms their mental health.³

Children and teens are uniquely vulnerable populations online, and these findings paint a clear and devastating picture of Instagram as an app that poses significant threats to young people’s wellbeing. As the internet—and social media specifically—becomes increasingly engrained in children and teens’ lives, we are deeply concerned that your company continues to fail in its obligation to protect young users and has yet to commit to halt its plans to launch new platforms targeting children and teens. The recently uncovered evidence published in the *Wall Street Journal* underscores Facebook’s responsibility to fundamentally change its approach to engaging with children and teens online. That starts with Facebook abandoning its plans to launch a new version of Instagram for kids.

Please provide responses to the following questions and requests for information by October 6, 2021:

1. Have you personally reviewed the aforementioned research regarding your young users’ mental health? If yes, when did you do so? If not, why not, and who among Facebook’s senior personnel has reviewed this research?
2. Please provide a detailed update on Facebook’s current plans for any new products or services targeting children or teens?
3. Will Facebook agree to abandon its plans to launch any new platforms for children or teens, including a version of Instagram for children? If not, why not?
4. When did Facebook begin studying its platforms’ impacts on teens’ mental health?
5. Please provide copies of all internal research Facebook has conducted regarding the mental health of your children and teen users.
6. Please provide copies of all external research Facebook has commissioned or otherwise accessed regarding the mental health of your children and teen users.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

³ *Id.*