

United States Senate

October 4, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

I write regarding reports that Facebook has failed to meet commitments the company has made regarding promotion of harmful advertisements to teen Facebook users. These assurances include comments offered by Antigone Davis, Facebook's Global Head of Safety, in response to questions I asked Ms. Davis at a recent public hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Facebook must explain the apparent discrepancy between its promises to protect young people and what it has delivered.

Facebook personnel, including a witness at last week's Senate hearing, have repeatedly stated that Facebook does not allow advertisers to target teen users with certain harmful content. Most recently, Facebook's Global Head of Safety stated under oath that Facebook forbids ads for tobacco, alcohol and weight loss to young people. Specifically, Ms. Davis stated to me directly: "We actually don't allow weight loss ads to be shown to people under the age of 18 already."¹ Later, in the same hearing, Ms. Davis stated, "We don't allow tobacco ads at all. We don't allow them to children either. We don't allow alcohol ads to minors."² Consistent with these statements, in May 2021, a Facebook spokesperson issued the following statement: "We prohibit ads about alcohol, weight loss products, and certain other topics from being shown to people under the age of 18, and we have age restriction tools so that business can better control who sees their content."³

Unfortunately, it appears that Facebook has failed to keep these commitments to me, other members of Congress, and your users. According to research conducted by the Campaign for

¹ *Hearing before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security "Protecting Kids Online: Facebook, Instagram, and Mental Health Harms?"* 117th Cong. (Sept. 30, 2021) (Statement of Facebook Global Head of Safety, Antigone Davis, to Sen. Markey, Member S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transportation).

² *Hearing before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security "Protecting Kids Online: Facebook, Instagram, and Mental Health Harms?"* 117th Cong. (Sept. 30, 2021) (Statement of Facebook Global Head of Safety, Antigone Davis, to Sen. Lee, Member S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transportation).

³ Sidney Fussell, *Facebook Allows Drug Ads to Target Teens, Activists Say*, *Wired* (May 4, 2021), <https://www.wired.com/story/activists-facebook-allows-drug-ads-target-teens/>.

Accountability's Tech Transparency Project, as recently as September 2021, Facebook allowed advertisers to target with inappropriate and dangerous content teen users as young as the age of 13. Researchers conducted an experiment in which they submitted advertisements promoting "pill abuse, alcoholic beverages, anorexia, smoking, dating services, and gambling" to Facebook and aimed those paid posts at users in the United States aged 13 to 17.⁴ One post showed a young woman's thin waist and promoted websites that glorify anorexia and offer advice on how to avoid eating. Another post showed a happy young woman with an e-cigarette in her hand. Facebook approved in less than an hour the researchers' request to target teen Facebook users with these and other ads, the researchers allege.

These findings cast serious doubt on Facebook's compliance with promises your employees have publicly made. They are particularly concerning in light of other recent reports, which suggest that Facebook has direct knowledge that its platforms are harmful to young people.⁵ I request a detailed explanation of the apparent inconsistency between Facebook's commitments and your platform's practices, as well as a detailed review of the steps you are currently taking and plan to take to stop Facebook from allowing teen users to be targeted with inappropriate and dangerous content. Please provide this information in writing by October 25, 2021.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁴ *Facebook's Repeat Fail on Harmful Teen Ads*, Tech Transparency Project, Campaign for Accountability (Oct. 1, 2021), <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/facebooks-repeat-fail-harmful-teen-ads>.

⁵ 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>.