



STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY 12224

KATHY HOCHUL
GOVERNOR

November 21, 2023

Meta (Facebook, Instagram)

Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer, Meta
1601 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025

TikTok

Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer, TikTok
5800 Bristol Pkwy
Culver City, CA 90230

Google (YouTube)

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer, Alphabet
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

X, Twitter

Linda Yaccarino
Chief Executive Officer, X
1355 Market St #900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Social Media Executives:

I am concerned about the impact your policies and practices are having on the safety and wellbeing of the people of New York State, as well as others around the country and the world, who use your platforms. In particular, I am alarmed about recent reports of massive increases in hateful, incendiary, and false and misleading content promoting antisemitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab views on your platforms. The circulation of videos promoting Osama Bin Laden's "Letter to America" was only among the most recent examples of a deeply troubling and dangerous trend.

You lead social media platforms whose users number in the billions. People of all ages and backgrounds use your products to communicate with loved ones, learn about topics that interest them, share information with others, and much more.

But too often, your platforms are breeding grounds for hateful content. That has been on particularly disturbing display in recent weeks. Users across your platforms have reported being flooded with hateful and threatening messages and comments, and content promoting explicit

calls for violence against Jewish, Muslim, and Arab people have proliferated — in some cases being shared tens of thousands of times. And while the most brazen messages have in many cases been removed, less overt content and coded messages that nonetheless carry violent and threatening meanings persist.

This is not simply a concern about the quality of our online discourse. Studies have shown that online hate speech contributes to real-world violence — and in New York State, we have seen the horrific proof, including in May 2022, when a man who was radicalized by white supremacist content online shot and killed ten people and injured others at a supermarket in Buffalo.

As Governor of New York State, I have repeatedly drawn attention to the threats posed by online hate speech, and I've taken action to combat that danger. In the last few months alone, I announced more than \$2 million to deploy additional investigators to Joint Terrorism Task Force locations around the state to assist in the investigation of alleged hate incidents; expanded the State Police's social media monitoring unit to identify credible threats happening in the state; announced the launch of a new dedicated hotline and reporting form for New Yorkers to report such hate and harassment; and announced tens of millions of dollars in funding to improve the safety and security of organizations at risk of hate crimes.

I'm also proud to be taking action together with Attorney General Letitia James and members of the legislature to protect our kids from some of the harms of social media, and put parents on alert. We know the algorithms that social media companies use have amplified content, often controversial content, to keep people on their platforms longer. The SAFE for Kids Act, introduced last month, will protect minors from these types of feeds unless they have parental consent.

It's time that you take meaningful action, too. Specifically:

1. You must ensure that your platform policies and terms of services are sufficiently well-defined and robustly enforced to actually have the effect of stopping the spread of hateful, false, and harassing content. This calls for active attention and, as necessary, responsiveness to the changing ways that messages of hate are communicated, sometimes in coded language.
2. You must provide adequate staffing and resources for teams working on trust and safety, content moderation, information integrity, and human rights protections. It is concerning that many social media and technology companies have reduced the resources provided for this work over the past year.
3. You must engage to understand the impact your policies have on users. To this end, your teams must do more to hear from diverse stakeholders, including civil society on the front lines of this fight as well as the communities most impacted by it.

4. You must be more transparent. We know too little about how hateful speech, harassment, disinformation, and other incendiary content spreads across online platforms. You should increase opportunities and mechanisms for independent, vetted researchers to have access to platform data to study this issue.
5. You must take greater responsibility for the way your platforms operate. Along with transparency, you owe it to your users and all of us to move away from operating models that rely on algorithmic systems that deliver hateful, extreme, and incendiary content to users. These practices extend the reach of the most problematic content, and the cost to society is simply too high.

Nothing is more important to me than the safety of New Yorkers. I will continue to do everything I can to prevent the online spaces used by our residents and others with connections to our state from becoming places where hate can fester until it spills out into our communities. I hope we can work together towards that common goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Hochul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Hochul
Governor