

DEBBIE DINGELL
12TH DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEES ON
HEALTH
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE
COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND COMMERCE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEES ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS
WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

116 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4071

19855 WEST OUTER DRIVE
SUITE 103-E
DEARBORN, MI 48124
(313) 278-2936

301 WEST MICHIGAN AVENUE
SUITE 400
YPSILANTI, MI 48197
(734) 481-1100

WEBSITE: DEBBIEDINGELL.HOUSE.GOV

October 16, 2020

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and CEO
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

This letter is being sent regarding the use of private groups and other Facebook tools that are being used to promote hateful rhetoric and violence. The recent news of the alleged plot to kidnap Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer is just the latest example of domestic terrorist groups using the platform to coordinate efforts and incite violence. According to the FBI affidavit, members of this group used Facebook as a platform to communicate and recruit, including sharing videos and photos in Facebook discussions, and posting in private Facebook groups.

As details emerge, we continue to learn about their activity on platforms, such as on Facebook, that signal blatantly unlawful activities and violent intent, drawing into question Facebook's means of reviewing this content and enforcing its community guidelines. Facebook often relies on users to flag content that violates Facebook's terms of service for review. However, private Facebook groups, in which hateful content is less likely to be flagged because group members generally support the content regardless of whether it violates community guidelines, present a serious risk in allowing this content to proliferate.

These revelations about the use of Facebook to plan the kidnapping of Governor Whitmer are deeply disturbing and underscore a pattern of violent groups using the platform to normalize hateful rhetoric and coordinate potentially violent actions. Facebook's failure to act threatens our democratic norms and actively contributes to the division in our country. As revealed by the FBI's affidavit, people's lives and safety are at risk, and this issue cannot go ignored.

To ensure that Facebook continues to take necessary action to prevent this type of behavior on the platform, we request detailed information on Facebook's efforts to identify and eliminate the spread of disinformation and hate speech on its platform, including enforcing community guidelines on the content posted or shared in private Facebook groups. It is critical

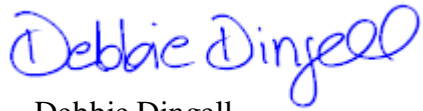
that Facebook's policies consider its users' legitimate right to privacy, while also taking measures to preempt calls for violence and remove hateful content. I therefore request written responses to the following questions:

1. Facebook has continued to evolve into a tool for spreading hate, discord, and inciting violence through unchecked dissemination of misinformation. What additional direct actions are Facebook taking or considering to curb the spread of misinformation and hateful content on the platform?
2. To what extent is Facebook enforcing and ensuring that private groups and hidden groups abide by Facebook's terms of service, and that the private groups and hidden groups are not actively contributing to misinformation, radicalization, and promoting violence? How does Facebook enforce their community guidelines with respect to content posted in private groups and hidden groups?
3. Facebook generally uses artificial intelligence (AI) tools and reporting by Facebook users to identify content that violates community guidelines. What measures are used to ensure content in private groups that may directly support hateful content does not violate Facebook's terms of service or directly threaten another individual? Does AI flag content posted or shared in private groups, and how effective are AI tools at flagging content in both public and private groups? What measurements does Facebook use to determine the effectiveness of its AI for content moderation?
4. How does Facebook identify violative content that may use coded language to obscure violent or hateful intent in groups, event pages, and other Facebook profiles? What actions are taken to review this content? Is AI capable of monitoring this type of language, and how effective is it at flagging this type of content?
5. It is my understanding, in an effort to promote the use of groups and encourage users to join more groups Facebook is actively putting "public posts" from groups into user news feeds. This means people could be exposed to disinformation without even being a member of these groups. Can you confirm or clarify Facebook's current practice and, if this is the case, can you explain what measures are being taken to prevent the amplification of inaccurate or hateful content? And how do these new Facebook tools apply to private and hidden groups?
6. It is my understanding, Facebook now makes specific suggestions to join other private groups based on the current private group or groups a user is in. Is this true and what is Facebook doing to prevent disinformation-based or hate-based private groups from being spread through Facebook recommendations?

It is clear that Facebook must do more to combat domestic terrorist and extremist groups using the platform to proliferate hateful and dangerous content. Social media provides a powerful tool for people to connect and engage each other, which under the current pandemic is more important than ever. However, we must also ensure that these avenues are not used to empower violent or hateful groups.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and I look forward to full and prompt responses to these questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Debbie Dingell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress