

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2022

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write regarding recent reports that Meta has failed to protect children and teen Instagram users from harmful eating disorder content.¹ Meta has an obligation to prioritize the wellbeing of its young users, and company representatives have stated before Congress that Meta is committed to the health and safety of the children and teens who use its platforms.² Unfortunately, new research indicates that Meta is amplifying dangerous and unhealthy eating disorder content to users ages 9 to 18.

According to one recent report,³ Meta profiles children and teens based on their activity on Instagram and uses that information to algorithmically push content that can encourage dangerous eating behavior. Researchers found that, due to Instagram’s algorithmic practices, pro-eating-disorder accounts gained young followers and spread unhealthy content, even when those pro-eating-disorder accounts were inactive.⁴ This research identified children as young as 9 and 10 potentially trapped in bubbles of eating disorder content.⁵ These accounts posted disturbing visual content that celebrated “thinspiration” or “bonespiration,” terms used to promote eating disorders, including imagery of extremely underweight people as a dangerous body type to follow. Many of these accounts also posted content with tips on how

¹ See, e.g., *Designing for Disorder: Instagram’s Pro-eating Disorder Bubble*, Fairplay (Apr. 15, 2022), https://fairplayforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/designing_for_disorder.pdf (hereinafter “Fairplay, *Designing for Disorder Report*”); Georgia Wells, Jeff Horowitz, & Deepa Seetharaman, *Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls*, *Company Documents Show*, Wall Street Journal (Sept. 14, 2021), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>; Donie O’Sullivan, Clare Duffy & Sarah Jorgensen, *Instagram promoted pages glorifying eating disorders to teen accounts*, CNN Business (Oct. 4, 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/04/tech/instagram-facebook-eating-disorders/index.html>; Jennifer Neda John, *Instagram Triggered My Eating Disorder*, Slate (Oct. 14, 2021), <https://slate.com/technology/2021/10/instagram-social-media-eating-disorder-trigger.html>.

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) (Testimony of Facebook Global Head of Safety, Antigone Davis) <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2021/9/protecting-kids-online-facebook-instagram-and-mental-health-harms>.

³ Fairplay, *Designing for Disorder*, https://fairplayforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/designing_for_disorder.pdf.

⁴ *Id.* at 7.

⁵ *Id.* at 16.

to fight hunger or stick to unhealthy calorie count plans.⁶ According to the report, *one third* of the identified network of pro-eating disorder accounts on Instagram is under the age of 18, and these accounts reportedly have over half a million followers.⁷

This report is particularly concerning given Meta's record of failure to protect young people. Independent reports have previously documented Meta's failure to stop ads for tobacco, alcohol, and eating disorders from targeting teens.⁸ Additionally, even after Meta announced that it would significantly limit advertisers' ability to target children and teens on Facebook, research found that Facebook itself continued to target teens with ads based on those users' personal information.⁹ Those studies followed revelations that Facebook's own internal research discovered that Instagram made body image issues worse for teen girls.¹⁰ All of these failures are powerful evidence that Facebook's advertising and content amplification practices are fundamentally inconsistent with young users' wellbeing.

In light of these concerns, we request a written response to the following questions by May 21, 2022:

1. Will Meta commit to taking all necessary steps to stop the amplification of pro-eating disorder content, influencers, and accounts to children and teens? Please describe in detail the policy changes Meta will make in response to the increasing evidence showing the prevalence of this content among young users.
2. Will Meta commit to supporting federal legislation to ban all targeted advertising to children, covering at a minimum users under the age of 13? If not, why not?
3. The algorithms that push pro-eating-disorder content to Meta's users rely on those users' personal data. Will Meta commit to supporting federal legislation to update the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act to require online platforms to provide notice and obtain consent in order to collect data about teen users? If not, why not?
4. According to recent research, Meta makes \$0.5 million a year directly from the underage network of pro-eating-disorder accounts, and \$62 million in revenue from the users—including children and teens—who follow underage pro-eating-disorder accounts.¹¹ Please provide detailed information on the following:
 - a. Meta's total annual advertising revenue derived from pro-eating disorder accounts;
 - b. Meta's annual advertising revenue derived from pro-eating disorder accounts managed by under-age (under 18 years old) users; and
 - c. Meta's annual advertising revenue derived from under-age followers of pro-eating disorder accounts.

⁶ *Id.* at 2, 5.

⁷ *Id.* at Executive Summary.

⁸ See, e.g., *Facebook's Repeat Fail on Harmful Teen Ads*, Tech Transparency Project, Campaign for Accountability (Oct. 1, 2021), <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/facebook-repeat-fail-harmful-teen-ads>.

⁹ See Letter from Senator Edward J. Markey, U.S. Senator for Massachusetts, to Mark Zuckerberg, Chief Executive Officer, Meta (Nov. 22, 2021), https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_-_facebook_ad_targeting_to_teens.pdf.

¹⁰ See Georgia Wells, Jeff Horowitz, & Deepa Seetharaman, *Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show*, Wall Street Journal (Sept. 14, 2021), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>.


¹¹ Fairplay, *Designing for Disorder Report* at 13.

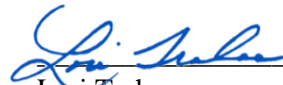
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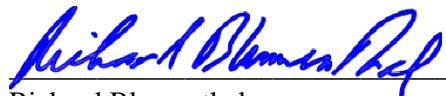
5. Given Meta's continued failure to protect children and teens on its platforms, will Meta commit to abandoning its plans to launch a version of Instagram for kids? If not, why not?


Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Lori Trahan
Member of Congress


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator


Kathy Castor
Member of Congress