

October 20, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

I write to request your participation in a Congressional hearing on Instagram and kids. Parents across America are deeply disturbed by ongoing reports that Facebook knows that Instagram can cause destructive and lasting harms to many teens and children, especially to their mental health and wellbeing. Those parents, and the twenty million teens that use your app, have a right to know the truth about the safety of Instagram.

On October 5th, my Subcommittee heard powerful testimony from former Facebook employee Frances Haugen that there are material dangers to kids on Instagram that are the result of the commercial choices that Facebook has made in its algorithms and product designs. Ms. Haugen further described first hand experiences during which Facebook executives and managers dismissed recommendations from her and other employees to address dangers on its platforms. This testimony reinforced the chilling reports of the Wall Street Journal, and is bolstered by documents that Ms. Haugen provided to my personal office. These revelations all paint a picture of a powerful corporation that has failed to act to protect teens because it prioritized its financial bottom line over safety.

I am disappointed that Facebook has been unwilling to be fully transparent with me, other members of Congress, and the public, and appears to have concealed vital information from us about teen mental health and addiction. When I sought specific information about Instagram and teens in an August letter, Facebook provided clearly evasive and misleading answers that have now been directly disputed by Ms. Haugen. I was further disturbed that Ms. Antigone Davis could not provide the Subcommittee with specific plans to address these proven risks to teens, such as the amplification of eating disorder content. Moreover, Ms. Haugen's testimony put into dispute several of Ms. Davis's answers to our Subcommittee.

I also regret that, as parents watched Ms. Haugen's compelling testimony, Facebook representatives, including yourself, have doubled down on evasive answers, keeping hidden several

reports on teen health, offering noncommittal and vague plans for action at an unspecified time down the road, and even turning to personal attacks on Ms. Haugen. As recently as this weekend, Facebook has continued to demean impactful and independent investigative reporting as an “orchestrated ‘gotcha’ campaign” and downplayed its own research.¹ Rather than casting baseless aspirations on whistleblowers and journalists, Facebook should be vigorously acting to provide parents with firm commitments for dramatic reforms and direct answers. Sadly, it is not.

Finally, I am dismayed that Ms. Davis appears to have provided false or inaccurate testimony to me regarding attempts to internally conceal its research. Notably, in response to direct questions about whether Facebook has locked down or shut out access to documents, Ms. Davis stated “it's not my understanding that we've done that” and committed to following up with my office about any changes in that understanding. However, last week, several media outlets reported that has locked down documents from the Facebook Integrity team.² These are the actions of a company attempting to resist scrutiny, not embrace transparency.

In recent days, Facebook posted a series of tweets apparently seeking to preempt or defuse any additional disclosures. It denounced previous revelations of bombshell documents as a “curated selection out of millions of documents at Facebook.” But, Facebook still refuses to make public those documents in any meaningful or transparent way. Its continued concealment and covering speaks volumes.

It is urgent and necessary for you or Mr. Adam Mosseri to testify to set the record straight and provide members of Congress and parents with a plan on how you are going to protect our kids.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Richard Blumenthal
Chair
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection,
Product Safety, and Data Security
United States Senate

¹ <https://twitter.com/fbnewsroom/status/1450154002755178499>

² Mac, Ryan. “Facebook Clamps down on Its Internal Message Boards.” New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/13/technology/facebook-workplace-transparency-leaks.html>.
Newton, Casey. “Congress Reads the Facebook Files.” Platformer, September 30, 2021. <https://www.platformer.news/p/congress-reads-the-facebook-files>.