Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 26, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

Nearly four million people have already died from COVID-19 worldwide and thousands more are dying every day. While highly effective vaccines present the opportunity to end this pandemic, our inability to vaccinate higher percentages of the global population quickly is standing in the way. That is why it is so disturbing that your platform is fueling vaccine hesitancy by allowing the spread of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines. This is directly resulting in additional deaths that are entirely preventable.

Last week the White House highlighted the vaccine misinformation and singled out 12 people who account for 65% of the misinformation on social media platforms.[1] This "disinformation dozen" have large audiences on platforms like Facebook and Instagram and can quickly elevate a lie to the forefront of national news and conversation. Anti-vaccine accounts on Facebook and Instagram were found to have as many as 37 million followers.[2] The disinformation dozen and other anti-vaccine accounts today continue to post content that violates your platforms' terms of service, seemingly without any consequences.

The Attorney General of the District of Columbia, Karl Racine, has called on Facebook to publicly release the results of an internal study that reportedly examined the role the company has played in the spread of misinformation and disinformation throughout the pandemic. We agree with his assessment and urge you to publish the internal study. Identifying online communities who've had the most exposure to the falsehoods, lies and distortions that have appeared on your platform serves the best interests of global public health. It's past time for Facebook to come clean about your role in prolonging the COVID-19 pandemic and commit to rectifying deadly mistakes that it has made in the past year.

Your failure to meet Mr. Racine's deadline is just the latest in a long line of failures to disclose or act upon internal research that outlines Facebook's role in the spread of misinformation and disinformation. This includes research on racial bias in Facebook's algorithms[3], your failings

[1] https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/16/tech/misinformation-covid-facebook-twitter-white-house/index.html
[2] https://252f2edd-1c8b-49f5-9bb2-cb57bb47e4ba.filesusr.com/ugd/f4d9b9_00b2ad56fe524d82b271a75e441cd06c.pdf, page 12
[3] https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/facebook-management-ignored-internal-research-showing-racial-bias-current-former-n1234746

leading up to the January 6th insurrection at the United States Capitol[4], and the polarizing impact of your platform[5], just to name a few.

Misinformation and disinformation have run ramp on Facebook and Instagram since the beginning of the epidemic. Facebook has housed, and even recommended, pages and groups that share misinformation about masks and handwashing, myths about children's ability to contract COVID-19, false claims about the dangers of that COVID-19, and lies about vaccines efficacy. This content is undermining efforts to curb the pandemic and save lives, yet they continue to operate and spread their lies on your platform despite grave consequences. As a result, the pandemic rages on and people continue to die from COVID-19.

Vaccine hesitancy is now a major contributor to the continued spread of COVID-19, and that is in large part due to the spread of misinformation and disinformation through platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Many members of the disinformation dozen have spread lies about vaccines well before the pandemic, yet Facebook continues to give these reckless actors a platform on which to do so. De-platforming them could prevent countless more deaths. It is unconscionable that these bad actors continue to have Facebook's perch upon which to spread their lies and distortions.

Despite public pledges to the contrary, Facebook algorithms also continue to recommend anti-vaccine groups and pages that continue to spread lies about COVID-19 and vaccines, further demonstrating the harm that Facebook and Instagram are causing. Additionally, current standards for removing misleading content about COVID-19 are not evenly enforced. Less than one-third of Spanish-language misinformation and disinformation is removed and less than half in non-English European languages have been removed.

Facebook has heard these complaints before and sadly has not taken action. White House Chief of Staff Ron Klain shared recently that he has, "told Mark Zuckerberg directly that when we gather groups of people who are not vaccinated, and we ask them, 'Why aren't you vaccinated?' and they tell us things that are wrong, tell us things that are untrue, and we ask them where they've heard that. The most common answer is Facebook."[6] There is also publicly available research released by Voto Latino and Media Matters for America that shows that among the Latinx community, Facebook is the primary driver of misinformation fueling vaccine hesitancy.[7] Despite this, no substantive action has been taken.

Though you failed to meet Mr. Racine's initial deadline, heeding Mr. Racine's call to publicly release your internal study and cooperate with his investigation is in the best interest of our global public health goals. De-platforming those responsible for actively spreading lies and conspiracy theories ought to be a no-brainer for any responsible corporate citizen. These actions

[4] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanmac/full-facebook-stop-the-steal-internal-report
[5] https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-it-encourages-division-top-executives-nixed-solutions-11590507499
[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/01/opinion/sway-kara-swisher-ron-klain.html
[7] https://votolatino.org/media/press-releases/vaccine-hesitancy/

will save lives, while continued inaction will result in more deaths. Facebook should do the right thing for once and finally take these substantive steps to right their wrongs.

We respectfully request a response to the questions above no later than August 26, 2021.

1. How many people saw the 18 million pieces of COVID-19 misinformation Facebook removed?

2. How many posts that were flagged as COVID-19 misinformation has Facebook reviewed, but not removed? Please provide the 10 most viewed posts.

3. Has Facebook informed advertisers that their ads appeared next to content that was flagged as potential COVID-19 misinformation but not removed?

4. How much advertising revenue was generated by the engagement of users who saw the 18 million misinformation posts?

5. Were the advertisers that supported these users' engagement informed that they appeared alongside vaccine misinformation?

6. If yes, did Facebook refund the advertisers' money, assuming they object to the spread of vaccine misinformation?

Sincerely,

Jan Schakowsky
Chair, Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee
House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Anna Eshoo
Chair, Health Subcommittee
House Committee on Energy and Commerce