

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2024

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Mr. Zuckerberg,

We write to express our deep concerns with recent reports of illicit drug advertisements on your platforms – Instagram, Facebook, Messenger, and WhatsApp.

On March 16, 2024, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that U.S. federal prosecutors have been investigating Meta for facilitating the sale of illicit drugs. Instead of quickly addressing the issue and fully removing the illicit content, on July 31, 2024, the *Wall Street Journal* again reported that Meta was “running ads on Facebook and Instagram that steer users to online marketplaces for illegal drugs.”¹

This is not the first time your organization has been caught facilitating drug sales on your platforms. Also on July 31, 2024, the Tech Transparency Project (TTP) published an investigation that found over 450 ads on Instagram and Facebook selling pharmaceutical and other drugs over the last several months. TTP also conducted investigations in 2021 and 2022 that “showed how Instagram allowed teens as young as 13 to find drugs for sale on the platform in as little as two clicks.”²

As your own president of global affairs, Nick Clegg, addressed in March, the opioid epidemic and illicit drug sales are a “major public health issue.” Meta is also a member of the Alliance to Prevent Drug Harms, with the stated goal of disrupting the sale of synthetic drugs online and educating users about the risks.³ Yet, your organization and advertising arm are actively allowing users to access these substances through your platforms.

We are particularly concerned about the impact these advertisements have on children and teenagers. In 2022, an average of 22 minors, ages 14 to 18, died in the U.S. each week from drug overdoses.⁴ This is driven not by an increase in illicit drug use, but rather by the contents of drugs becoming deadlier due to the influx of fentanyl into the United States.⁵ Fentanyl is often found in counterfeit oxycodone, benzodiazepines, and other prescription pills – all of which have been found on your platforms, including in advertisements.⁶

¹ https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-cocaine-opioids-ads-dea8e0fc?mod=hp_lead_pos6

² <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/meta-allows-drug-ads-selling-everything-from-opioids-to-cocaine>

³ <https://twitter.com/nickclegg/status/1768663371820446029>

⁴ <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/release/about-22-high-school-age-adolescents-died-each-week>

⁵ <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/fentanyl#references>

⁶ https://x.com/TTP_updates/status/1821191621591056394

At a hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary in January 2024, you personally apologized to the parents of children who have died following their exposure to exploitation, harassment, and drugs online.⁷ Despite this and your company's own Community Standards,⁸ Meta approved ads throughout 2024 that displayed obvious drug sales, including "packages of OxyContin and piles of unidentified, brightly colored pills," as well as MDMA, ecstasy, cocaine, and others. Meta even approved ads from pages and organizations that had blatant drug-related names, such as "Ecstasy Meds."⁹

Meta appears to have continued to shirk its social responsibility and defy its own community guidelines. Protecting users online, especially children and teenagers, is one of our top priorities. We are continuously concerned that Meta is not up to the task and this dereliction of duty needs to be addressed.

What is particularly egregious about this instance is that this was not user generated content on the dark web or on private social media pages, but rather they were advertisements approved and monetized by Meta. Many of these ads contained blatant references to illegal drugs in their titles, descriptions, photos, and advertiser account names, which were easily found by the researchers and journalists at the *Wall Street Journal* and Tech Transparency Project using Meta's Ad Library. However, they appear to have passed undetected or been ignored by Meta's own internal processes.

Time and time again we have heard from Meta that users come to your platforms because they like the personalization and experiences you provide, and you use sensitive personal information to direct such personalization through content and advertisements. We in Congress, on multiple occasions, have worked to establish data privacy and security protections for Americans but have, in each instance, been met with friction and opposition from Meta with claims that we would drastically disrupt this personalization you are providing. If this personalization you are providing is pushing advertisements of illicit drugs to vulnerable Americans, then it is difficult for us to believe that you are not complicit in the trafficking of illicit drugs.

Considering these alarming reports, please respond to the following questions by September 6, 2024.

1. How many illicit drug advertisements has Meta discovered across its platforms?
2. How many illicit drug advertisements have been reported to Meta on its platforms it did not discover?
3. How much revenue has Meta collected from these advertisements for illicit drugs across all platforms?

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/31/tiktok-meta-x-congress-hearing-child-sexual-exploitation>

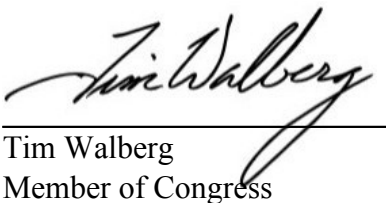
⁸ <https://transparency.meta.com/policies/community-standards/restricted-goods-services/>

⁹ <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/meta-allows-drug-ads-selling-everything-from-opioids-to-cocaine>

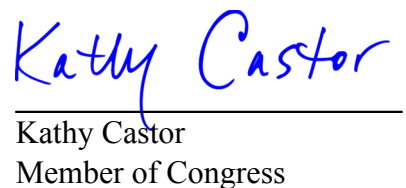
4. What processes does Meta use to review and approve drug-related advertisements? Were these processes followed for the aforementioned ads?
5. What action has been taken against these advertising entities?
6. What actions have been taken to prevent these entities from continuing to advertise on your platforms, whether through their current accounts or others?
7. Of the advertisements found to be in violation, on average, how long were they available on the platforms before they were taken down?
8. How many users viewed these advertisements?
9. How many users interacted with these advertisements?
10. Of these users who viewed or interacted with these advertisements, how many of them were minors?
11. What will Meta do to prevent illicit drugs from being advertised on your platforms in the future?
12. What governmental authorities are Meta consulting with and referring action to regarding these drug related advertisements?
13. Does Meta review each advertisement prior to tailoring or targeting them to users?
14. Do you believe Meta needs to have health information to provide tailored or targeted advertisements to Americans?
15. Was Meta using the personal health information of its users to deliver or target these ads?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



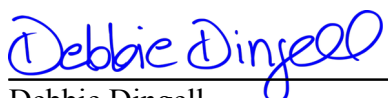
Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Randy K. Weber, Sr.
Vice Chair
Subcommittee on
Communications and
Technology



John Joyce, M.D.
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



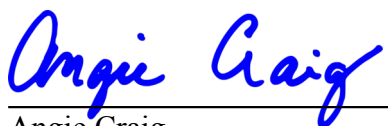
Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



Greg Pence
Member of Congress



Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress



Angie Craig
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress



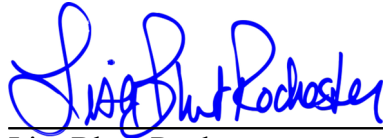
Mariannette Miller-Meeks,
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
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Seth Moulton
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