

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2019

Mark Zuckerberg  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
Facebook, Inc.  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

I was pleased to see your announcement in March that Facebook would no longer allow ads or recommendations promoting anti-vaccine information.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, dangerous anti-vaccine content remains widely available on the platform.<sup>2</sup> Given the serious risk to public health, Facebook must do more to quell this dangerous content. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 26 states have reported 971 cases of measles this year.<sup>3</sup> My home state of New Jersey is home to at least 14 cases of measles this year with an outbreak occurring in Ocean County.<sup>4</sup> This is a public health crisis, fueled in part by dangerously erroneous anti-vaccination social media.

Weeks after Facebook announced that it would no longer promote anti-vaccine content, such ads continued to run on the platform through at least April 20.<sup>5</sup> According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Facebook was still running ads for anti-vaccine groups in mid-May.<sup>6</sup> As Facebook itself admitted, tools for detecting banned content were not yet ready for deployment.<sup>7</sup>

Putting aside the need to refine new tools, I find it extremely concerning that Facebook appears to not be using the tools it has available. In March, Facebook said it would reduce the ranking of pages and groups that spread misinformation about vaccines in search results and news feeds.<sup>8</sup> Yet, “administrators of several of the top-recommended Facebook groups related to vaccines explicitly endorse the claim that vaccines cause autism, and the most popular Facebook page related to vaccines—with 106,000 likes—is for an anti-vaccine documentary making similar claims.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-anti-vaccine-crack-down/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-pledged-crackdown-on-vaccine-misinformation-then-not-much-happened-11559243847>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/health/measles-who-is-being-affected/?utm\\_term=.5e9111addb57](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/health/measles-who-is-being-affected/?utm_term=.5e9111addb57)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/measles.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active\\_status=all&ad\\_type=political\\_and\\_issue\\_ads&country=US&q=Stop%20Mandatory%20Vaccination](https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=political_and_issue_ads&country=US&q=Stop%20Mandatory%20Vaccination)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-pledged-crackdown-on-vaccine-misinformation-then-not-much-happened-11559243847>

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

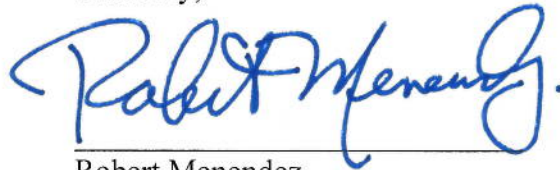
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-anti-vaccine-crack-down/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-pledged-crackdown-on-vaccine-misinformation-then-not-much-happened-11559243847>

In addition, dangerous anti-vaccine content still prominently appears on Instagram. According to CNN, in early May, “the hashtag #VaccinesKill was still up on the site and was a top result after anti-vax accounts.”<sup>10</sup>

While we recognize that removing such dangerous content will not take place overnight, we are alarmed that it is taking Facebook over two months to implement its own policy during the ongoing public health crisis directly related to anti-vaccine rhetoric. To that end, I ask that Facebook increase its efforts to tamp down on anti-vaccine content and I look forward to hearing from you on your progress.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/08/tech/instagram-vaccine-misinformation/index.html>