

September 16, 2025

**VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION**

Mark Zuckerberg  
Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer  
Meta Inc.  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write regarding disturbing allegations presented by several whistleblowers that Meta has willfully misrepresented the mental health risks, sexual exploitation issues, underage use, and other abuses against young people that are rampant on its platforms. Despite repeated assurances from you and other Meta executives that your company has finally begun prioritizing children's safety, these disclosures suggest that Meta executives instead have systemically covered up risks and blocked research, even as it worked to expand potentially unsafe products to young teens and children. We write to request all research, communications, and policies from Meta regarding its internal research initiatives, the effectiveness of its safety efforts, and the prevalence of harms to young people on its platforms.

On September 8th, 2025, six whistleblowers focused on youth wellbeing and other safety issues went public with allegations that Meta had censored, blocked, and even required the deletion of research into the prevalence and underlying causes of harms to young people on its platforms, including within its Reality Labs (virtual reality) division.<sup>1</sup> According to documents provided to our offices, Meta has straightjacketed its staff under a "Social Issues Protocol" that requires advanced and additional review of research that covers matters such as human trafficking, suicide, eating disorders, bullying, and child trafficking.<sup>2</sup> In practice, those researchers found that Meta installed monitors from their legal department that routinely altered, blocked, and shutdown work on teen safety, limited internal access to information, circumvented normal review processes, used attorney-client privilege to conceal research, and even required the destruction of data.<sup>3</sup>

This willful blindness, according to one whistleblower, meant a "variety of topics going un-researched, including what kinds of harms youth were experiencing in VR (i.e. bullying, grooming, body image)"<sup>4</sup> and that internal experts "could only support "non-sensitive" topics."<sup>5</sup> Researchers were given explicit guidance that teen participants in survey research "could not be asked questions which might lead them to discuss things like dieting or body image concerns"

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Swaine & Naomi Nix, *Meta Suppressed Research on Child Safety, Employees Say*, WASH. POST (September 8, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2025/09/08/meta-research-child-safety-virtual-reality/>.

<sup>2</sup> Charlie Exhibit 4, Charlie Exhibit 33

<sup>3</sup> Charlie Exhibit 36, Charlie Exhibit 38, Delta Exhibit 2, Alpha Declaration ¶47-52, Charlie Declaration ¶14-15

<sup>4</sup> Beta Declaration ¶15

<sup>5</sup> Beta Declaration ¶52

and proposals to explicitly study such topics were denied.<sup>6</sup> When asked for the reasons for the denial, Meta’s legal staff reportedly cited “regulatory concerns” and reputational risk, such as the company’s effort to avoid actual knowledge of children using the platform and the toxic effects of the platform on young people.<sup>7</sup>

The whistleblowers’ allegations focus on Meta’s near-obsessive attempts to push its virtual reality products from Reality Labs onto young teens and even children, demonstrating that its “move fast and break things” motto still sacrifices the wellbeing of young people in favor of profit. By 2022, Meta executives, tasked with increasing engagement, had made the decision to expand access to its VR headsets (Quest) to children (10-13, an effort dubbed “Project Salsa”) and open access to teens for its VR social media platform (Horizon Worlds). According to the whistleblowers, this decision happened before any meaningful research on the potential dangers had occurred (beyond mere studies on the physical safety of wearing the headset) and despite deep concerns from internal experts that VR might be inherently *more* dangerous than already dangerous and harmful traditional social media products. As one Meta employee wrote in an internal post, the “more immersive an experience is, the more challenging users may find it to distinguish between VR and non-VR realities—*younger users in particular*.”<sup>8</sup> As one whistleblower later wrote, when parents are already “concerned about ten year olds being so immersed in social media that they socially withdraw and have difficulty prioritizing and understanding real life over their virtual one, imagine how much worse it can be when they’re totally immersed in that virtual world.”<sup>9</sup>

Blocked by Meta legal staff from much-needed, direct research on the prevalence and impact of virtual reality and potential harms to children, the whistleblowers sought to gather data from outside traditional channels. What they learned was alarming, finding stories and reports of:

rampant bullying within VR (Children bullying adults; adults bullying children; children bullying other children.); children experiencing and participating in hate speech (i.e. users saying “Your [sic] black you have no rights”); pedophilic acts, including adults virtually simulating child rape (i.e. users saying “Thanks meta for making this the pedophile kingdom”); children sharing personally identifying information with strangers (i.e. home address); grooming; children willingly simulating sexual acts with each other and with adults; children being exposed to adult culture, including drugs, violence, and vulgar language.<sup>10</sup>

Using reviews within Meta’s Quest app store as one channel, they found Meta’s Horizon platform had the highest number of complaints within app store reviews regarding underage users, sexual violence, gambling, and pedophilia.<sup>11</sup> The researchers frequently heard kids and parents share stories about those same abuses during focus groups and surveys. According to the

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<sup>6</sup> Beta Declaration ¶53, 62; Alpha Declaration ¶84

<sup>7</sup> Charlie Exhibit 34; Alpha Declaration ¶149

<sup>8</sup> Beta Exhibit 2, pg. 3, Beta Exhibit 15, pg. 2 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> Beta Declaration ¶38

<sup>10</sup> Beta Declaration ¶66

<sup>11</sup> Alpha Exhibit 49, Beta Exhibit 5, Beta Exhibit 9

whistleblowers, these reports were excised and deleted, and outcomes were altered to paint a more positive impression of Meta’s VR products, even within internal research.<sup>12</sup>

The whistleblower disclosures also suggest that Meta’s existing child safety efforts have fallen far short of its promises and claims of effectiveness made to the public and Congress. For example, when you appeared before Congress, we raised the issue of Meta failing to remove accounts of pedophiles that were reported by users<sup>13</sup>—a systemic issue documented by *The Wall Street Journal* and confirmed by our offices.<sup>14</sup> Both you and Adam Mosseri have previously stated, in testimony before the United States Senate, that Meta prioritizes child exploitation cases.<sup>15</sup> However, according to an internal post responding to a Meta employee who observed the same enforcement failure, it appears that Instagram user reports—including child exploitation reports—were automatically closed within two days if they were not acted on.<sup>16</sup> These disclosures also note Meta employees and advertising clients’ own frustrations with getting child exploitation material removed.<sup>17</sup> Further, these allegations suggest Meta’s failure was not a mistake, as you and Mr. Mosseri claimed. Rather, it was a disturbing matter of policy, ignoring countless reports of pedophiles by parents and young people, without even bothering to review them.

Instead, Meta executives—according to the whistleblowers—believed that responsibility for protecting young users should fall solely onto parents and other VR app developers. This decision was made despite Meta knowing their parental control tools were often ineffective and unused. Meta’s own researchers found that parents were not aware of their existence. On Instagram, in one survey that 2% of parents had turned them on.<sup>18</sup> When they were able to conduct surveys with parents, researchers in Reality Labs found “parents were neither prepared to meaningfully use the VR parental controls, nor likely to use them often, and that the controls alone were insufficient to keep teens safe.”<sup>19</sup> The reasons for this failure included the fact that a substantial number of young people—more than half of teens—appear to lie about their age, that parents have a more difficult time monitoring VR compared to phones, and that Meta had not been able to make use of age data from other Meta platforms in VR.<sup>20</sup> These parental tools also suffered from little to no research on their effectiveness prior to release.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it appears that proposals to extend age assurance efforts from other in Meta platforms to VR were stymied

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<sup>12</sup> Beta Declaration ¶103-106; Alpha Declaration ¶88-94

<sup>13</sup> “Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis.” Senate Judiciary Committee. January 31, 2024. <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/committee-activity/hearings/big-tech-and-the-online-child-sexual-exploitation-crisis>

<sup>14</sup> Jeff Horwitz & Katherine Blunt, *Instagram Connects Vast Pedophile Network*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (June 7, 2023), <https://www.wsj.com/tech/instagram-vast-pedophile-network-4ab7189>.

<sup>15</sup> “Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis.” Senate Judiciary Committee; “Protecting Kids Online: Instagram and Reforms for Young Users.” Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security. December 8, 2021. <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2021/12/protecting-kids-online-instagram-and-reforms-for-young-users> [Adam Mosseri: “Yes, I believe we try and respond to all reports and if we ever fail that is a mistake we should correct.”]

<sup>16</sup> Charlie Exhibit 1

<sup>17</sup> Charlie Exhibit 1

<sup>18</sup> Alpha Exhibit 59, Delta Exhibit 4, Alpha Declaration ¶87

<sup>19</sup> Beta Declaration ¶35-36

<sup>20</sup> Beta Exhibit 2, pg. 3-5, Beta Exhibit 15, pg. 2; Alpha Exhibit 17, pg. 7 [“57.5% of real teens lie about their age on Quest”]; Beta Declaration ¶87

<sup>21</sup> Beta Declaration ¶35

or canceled.<sup>22</sup> Parental controls, instead of being the solution for Meta's rampant dangers—as they had been branded to both parents and to Congress—appear to be ineffective and underutilized. Meta's effort to offload responsibility from itself to parents is no substitute for safety by design.

Altogether, Meta appears to have walked away from—and even obstructed—research into and remedies for the toxic impacts of its products, while misrepresenting the effectiveness of its efforts and lobbying against legislation that would legally require such precautions. Given the magnitude of these allegations against the backdrop of Meta's notoriously poor record on kids' online safety, we request the following information by **no later than October 15, 2025**:

1. Please provide all research that Meta has conducted regarding the prevalence of harms and safety risks to young people on its platforms, including bullying, sexual exploitation, and mental health disorders, and inclusive of Facebook (Blue), Instagram, Quest, and Horizon Worlds.
2. Please provide all policies and procedures that Meta has in place to review research proposals regarding harms to young people, as well as information that would describe how those proposals are reviewed and by whom.
3. Please provide all research applications submitted under Meta's Social Issues Protocol related in any manner to minors and, if those proposals were rejected or required changes, please provide the reasons for those responses and who made those decisions.
4. Please provide all research that Meta has conducted regarding the prevalence of children under the age of 13 on its platforms, including Facebook (Blue), Instagram, Quest, and Horizon Worlds.
5. Please provide all research that Meta has conducted regarding the use and effectiveness of its parental tools, including for Facebook (Blue), Instagram, Quest, and Horizon Worlds, and note whether such research was conducted prior to the roll out of the feature or the acceptance of children or teens on the relevant platform.
6. Please provide all policies and procedures regarding the handling of reports of child exploitation from users, including whether user reports are or have ever been subject to an automatic closure policy, and the number of child exploitation cases closed without human review and intervention.
7. According to a document provided to our offices, Meta has conducted at least one survey on parental concerns towards children using generative AI as early as December 2023. That research found that parents wanted more controls and safeguards over such products out of concern over inappropriate content and use.<sup>23</sup> Since that survey was conducted, Meta's generative AI products have been repeatedly found to sexually and emotionally exploit children. It has also been alleged that such actions were approved of by Meta

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<sup>22</sup> Beta Declaration ¶¶88-96

<sup>23</sup> Delta Exhibit 8

executives.<sup>24</sup> Please provide all research Meta has conducted on the safety and prevalence of harms occurring to children and teens using its generative AI tools, including reports and discussions of instances of such harms.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Privacy,  
Technology, and the Law



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Chuck Grassley  
Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee



Amy Klobuchar  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Privacy,  
Technology, and the Law



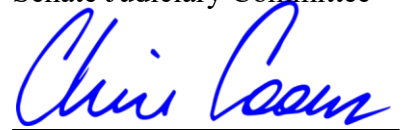
Ashley Moody  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Judiciary Committee



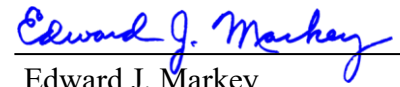
Josh Hawley  
U.S. Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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<sup>24</sup> Jeff Horwitz, *Meta's AI Rules Have Let Bots Hold 'Sensual' Chats with Kids, Offer False Medical Info*, REUTERS (Aug. 14, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/meta-ai-chatbot-guidelines/>.