

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 31, 2024

Mark Zuckerberg  
CEO  
Meta Platforms, Inc.  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write with concern about the ease by which advertisements for illicit drugs continue to be found on Facebook and Instagram, as recently highlighted by the Tech Transparency Project (TTP) and *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ). These ads were in plain violation of your policies, but your platforms' content moderation was apparently unable to find and take down this content. The United States is in the midst of a drug epidemic, with more than 100,000 Americans dying from overdoses last year, and an alarming amount of these drugs are sold online. It is crucial that everyone work to ensure these illegal drugs are found and taken off the streets. Therefore, we call on Meta to improve its human and automated advertising review and content moderation to address these failures that are placing lives at risk.

A recent investigation by TTP found “more than 450 ads on Instagram and Facebook selling an array of pharmaceutical and other drugs,” including various opioids, Xanax, and illicit drugs, like ecstasy and what appeared to be cocaine.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the WSJ “found dozens of ads marketing illegal substances such as cocaine and prescription opioids, including as recently as [July 26, 2024].”<sup>2</sup> TTP further claimed that “[m]any of the ads made no secret of their intentions, showing photos of prescription drug bottles, piles of pills and powders, or bricks of cocaine, and encouraging users to place orders.”<sup>3</sup> TTP reported that these advertisements “often directed users to encrypted messaging apps Telegram or Meta’s WhatsApp to connect with sellers.”<sup>4</sup> What is perhaps most troubling is that this is not the first time TTP has found drugs openly being sold on Meta’s platforms. TTP investigations in 2021<sup>5</sup> and 2022<sup>6</sup> “showed how Instagram allowed teens as young as 13 to find drugs for sale on the platform in as little as two clicks.”

When presented with these disturbing findings, Meta took some advertisements off its platforms. However, Meta’s refusal to take the steps necessary to *prevent* illicit drug advertisements, while accepting payments for advertisements that are harming families and in clear violation of Meta’s

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<sup>1</sup> “Meta Allows Drug Ads Selling Everything from Opioids to Cocaine,” July 31, 2024, Tech Transparency Project, <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/meta-allows-drug-ads-selling-everything-from-opioids-to-cocaine>.

<sup>2</sup> “Meta Has Run Hundreds of Ads for Cocaine, Opioids and Other Drugs,” Wall Street Journal, July 31, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-cocaine-opioids-ads-dea8e0fc>.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> “Xanax, Ecstasy, and Opioids: Instagram Offers Drug Pipeline to Kids,” December 7, 2021, Tech Transparency Project, <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/xanax-ecstasy-and-opioids-instagram-offers-drug-pipeline-kids>.

<sup>6</sup> “Spot Check: Instagram’s Drug Pipeline for Teens,” May 17, 2022, Tech Transparency Project, <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/spot-check-instagram-drug-pipeline-teens>.

policies, is particularly alarming. Surely, this is not what Meta means when it states its “mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together.”<sup>7</sup> We call on Meta to do the right thing and put in place more effective procedures and mechanisms that will stop the placement of advertisements that are obviously for the sale of illicit and illegal drugs.

We further call on Meta to join Snap and us in supporting the Cooper Davis Act, bipartisan legislation that would require social media platforms to report basic information to the federal government about drug activity involving fentanyl, methamphetamine, and fake pills.<sup>8</sup>

We urge you to work as quickly as possible to prevent any further harm to families and communities, and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

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<sup>7</sup> Meta’s 2023 10-K, filed on February 2, 2024, available at <https://investor.fb.com/financials/sec-filings-details/default.aspx?FilingId=17229405>.

<sup>8</sup> See “Meta Has Run Hundreds of Ads for Cocaine, Opioids and Other Drugs,” *supra* note 2.