BRIAN SCHATZ
HAWAII

HART BUILDING
SUITE SH–722
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–1105
(202) 224–3934

300 ALA MOANA BOULEVARD
ROOM 7–212
HONOLULU, HI 96850
(808) 523–2061

United States Senate

July 15, 2019

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

As the 2020 Census approaches, we are concerned about the spread of misinformation, including disinformation, on many social-media platforms.[i] The highly politicized atmosphere around the decennial census leaves census takers especially vulnerable to misinformation. In 2018, the Census Bureau's then-acting director, Ron Jarmin, identified the threat of misinformation as a serious challenge to an accurate census.[ii] Online platforms play a role in both the promotion and spread of misinformation and have a responsibility to put in place effective countermeasures to prevent the spread of misinformation. I am writing in support of responsible actions your company could take to help ensure that the 2020 Census is full, fair, and accurate.

The 2020 Census is less than a year away and represents one of the greatest undertakings of our country: a constitutionally mandated count of all people in the United States.[iii] The Census Bureau has one chance to get the count right and must complete the task on time to meet constitutional and legal requirements for congressional apportionment and redistricting.

The decennial census serves an important function for our representative democracy because it forms the basis for distributing the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the states—a determination that, in turn, affects the number of Electoral College seats each state has. Census data are also used to draw congressional and state legislative district lines, thus ensuring an equal voice in our democratic system of government for every American—an ideal embodied in the 14th Amendment.

In addition, the federal government allocates over $800 billion annually in program funds to states, localities, and families based on census or census-derived data. Census data are integral to a well-functioning government and to equitable access to federal, state, and local benefits and services, and public officials cannot adequately serve their communities if those data are not accurate and comprehensive. At all levels of government, officials rely on these data to understand community needs, locate vital services, allocate resources effectively, and plan for the future.

The value of accurate and complete census data extends beyond the functions of the government. Businesses invest in job-creating initiatives—such as building new production and sales facilities—when census data demonstrate that opportunities exist in a given community. Non-

governmental organizations use census data to target their limited resources to the most vulnerable communities with the greatest need.

The 2020 Census marks the first time there will be a widely available online response option. Asking Americans to answer personal and sensitive questions online raises cybersecurity and privacy concerns, both real and perceived, by the public. The Census Bureau must ensure that a quality information technology system, a robust cybersecurity plan, and knowledgeable personnel are in place. But it must also rely on outside partners to assist in efforts to make sure the public knows that it is both safe and secure to answer the census.

The Census Bureau is already preparing to combat misinformation by ensuring that people have access to accurate information about the decennial census.[iv] However, it cannot combat misinformation on its own. Online platforms are better situated to monitor the content on their sites and to stop the spread of misinformation. The Census Bureau has begun coordinating with some online platforms, in an effort to stop disinformation campaigns and minimize the impact of misinformation.

In that effort, I recommend the following:

(1) The 2020 Census must be treated as an extraordinary circumstance warranting temporary heightened actions to ensure that it is completed in a full, fair, and accurate manner. This should include:
    a) For YouTube:
        i) Initiating immediate takedown of content (including videos, descriptions, and comments) related to the 2020 Census identified as fraud, such as links supposedly from the Census Bureau that are phishing for users' personally identifying information;
        ii) Initiating immediate takedowns of content (including videos, descriptions, and comments) related to the 2020 Census identified as disinformation;
        iii) Developing clear policies and changes to the recommendation algorithm to address unintentional misinformation about the 2020 Census, such as videos claiming that federal agencies will share confidential census data; and
        iv) Notifying users who have engaged with fraudulent content, misinformation, or disinformation within a timely manner.
    b) For Google Search:
        i) Clear policies to address search results that promote disinformation and unintentional misinformation about the 2020 Census, such as removing such material from the index and improving site ranking and filtering algorithms in a timely fashion.

(2) Google should notify Congress, the Census Bureau, and key stakeholder partners in the 2020 Census—such as, but not limited to, states' Complete Counts Committees, the Census Project, Population Association of America, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice–AAJC, NAACP, and Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights —of both

Google Search and YouTube's policies regarding disinformation and misinformation about the decennial census by the end of October 2019. These policies should be clear and specific, allowing policymakers to address gaps where needed and providing key stakeholders the tools to monitor for disinformation and misinformation in the lead up to the 2020 Census.

(3) YouTube should provide access to the YouTube platform to trusted partners and include:
   a) A feed of:
      i) Suspicious new channels and new account activity;
      ii) Suspicious patterns of videos, such as those that are viral, non-high-quality content; and
      iii) A summary of accounts, networks, and content that are removed from the platform.
   b) A tool—such as a "co-watching" Application Programming Interface—that helps partners test the recommendation algorithm against specific audience parameters and patterns of harm.

(4) Google should commit to producing a quarterly report on actions taken in regards to YouTube and Google Search to protect the integrity of the census. This will allow researchers and policymakers to study effective counter strategies and better prepare us for future events. This reporting should include information related to the 2020 Census such as:
   a) For YouTube:
      i) Total amount of flagged or reported content (including videos, descriptions, and comments);
      ii) Total amount of content (including videos, descriptions, and comments) removed for fraud concerns;
      iii) Total amount of content (including videos, descriptions, and comments) removed or demoted for disinformation concerns;
      iv) Total number of times videos or sites were prevented from being promoted, or demoted, by the YouTube recommendation algorithm; and
      v) Total number of users who viewed or engaged with misinformation and disinformation.
   b) For Google Search:
      i) Total number of links flagged or reported by users;
      ii) Total number of links (or family of links) that were removed from the index; and
      iii) Total number of users who clicked through links (or family of links) identified as misinformation and disinformation.

(5) Google should commit to producing a report after the 2020 Census ends. This report should include:
   a) Conclusions about how effective the actions were taken as part of (1)
   b) Lessons learned from the tools provided to partners as part of (3); and
   c) Data analysis and summaries from the information produced as part of (4)

A full, fair, and accurate decennial census is the cornerstone of our democracy. I, therefore, urge you and other online platforms to proactively safeguard against both inadvertent misinformation about the 2020 Census and disinformation spread by bad actors. Thank you, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that the 2020 Census provides an accurate count of the U.S. population in all communities.

Sincerely,

BRIAN SCHATZ
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
   Communications, Technology,
   Innovation, and the Internet

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[i] For our purposes, misinformation refers to information that is false or incorrect, whereas disinformation refers to information known to be false and actively spread by bad actors. For example, if a person or page stated that the 2020 Census was voluntary, that post would be an example of misinformation. However, to use a recent example, the video of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, which was purposely doctored to portray her in a negative light, and shared on Facebook and other online platforms to perpetuate a falsehood, is an example of disinformation.

[ii] Hansi Lo Wang, "Transcript: Census Bureau Acting Director Ron Jarmin's Interview with NPR," *NPR*, 11 July 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/07/11/627352984/transcript-census-bureaus-acting-director-ron-jarmins-interview-with-npr.

[iii] The Enumeration Clause in Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution reads: "The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct."

[iv] Jack Corrigan, "Census is Preparing to Fight Social Media Misinformation Campaigns," *Nextgov*, 31 Jan. 2019, https://www.nextgov.com/analytics-data/2019/01/census-preparing-fight-social-media-misinformation-campaigns/154561/.

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United States Senate

July 15, 2019

Steve Huffman
Chief Executive Officer
Reddit Inc.
420 Taylor Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Huffman:

As the 2020 Census approaches, we are concerned about the spread of misinformation, including disinformation, on many social-media platforms.[i] The highly politicized atmosphere around the decennial census leaves census takers especially vulnerable to misinformation. In 2018, the Census Bureau's then-acting director, Ron Jarmin, identified the threat of misinformation as a serious challenge to an accurate census.[ii] Online platforms play a role in both the promotion and spread of misinformation and have a responsibility to put in place effective countermeasures to prevent the spread of misinformation. I am writing in support of responsible actions your company could take to help ensure that the 2020 Census is full, fair, and accurate.

The 2020 Census is less than a year away and represents one of the greatest undertakings of our country: a constitutionally mandated count of all people in the United States.[iii] The Census Bureau has one chance to get the count right and must complete the task on time to meet constitutional and legal requirements for congressional apportionment and redistricting.

The decennial census serves an important function for our representative democracy because it forms the basis for distributing the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the states—a determination that, in turn, affects the number of Electoral College seats each state has. Census data are also used to draw congressional and state legislative district lines, thus ensuring an equal voice in our democratic system of government for every American—an ideal embodied in the 14th Amendment.

In addition, the federal government allocates over $800 billion annually in program funds to states, localities, and families based on census or census-derived data. Census data are integral to a well-functioning government and to equitable access to federal, state, and local benefits and services, and public officials cannot adequately serve their communities if those data are not accurate and comprehensive. At all levels of government, officials rely on these data to understand community needs, locate vital services, allocate resources effectively, and plan for the future.

The value of accurate and complete census data extends beyond the functions of the government. Businesses invest in job-creating initiatives—such as building new production and sales facilities—when census data demonstrate that opportunities exist in a given community. Non-

governmental organizations use census data to target their limited resources to the most vulnerable communities with the greatest need.

The 2020 Census marks the first time there will be a widely available online response option. Asking Americans to answer personal and sensitive questions online raises cybersecurity and privacy concerns, both real and perceived, by the public. The Census Bureau must ensure that a quality information technology system, a robust cybersecurity plan, and knowledgeable personnel are in place. But it must also rely on outside partners to assist in efforts to make sure the public knows that it is both safe and secure to answer the census.

The Census Bureau is already preparing to combat misinformation by ensuring that people have access to accurate information about the decennial census.[iv] However, it cannot combat misinformation on its own. Online platforms are better situated to monitor the content on their sites and to stop the spread of misinformation. The Census Bureau has begun coordinating with some online platforms, in an effort to stop disinformation campaigns and minimize the impact of misinformation.

In that effort, I recommend the following:

(1) The 2020 Census must be treated as an extraordinary circumstance warranting temporary heightened actions to ensure that it is completed in a full, fair, and accurate manner. This should include:
   a) Initiating immediate takedowns of threads or subreddits related to the 2020 Census identified as fraud, such as those purporting to be from the Census Bureau that are phishing for users' personally identifying information;
   b) Initiating immediate takedowns of threads or subreddits related to the 2020 Census identified as disinformation;
   c) Developing clear policies to address unintentional misinformation about the 2020 Census, such as threads claiming that federal agencies will share confidential census data; and
   d) Notifying users who have engaged with fraudulent content, misinformation, or disinformation within a timely manner.

(2) Reddit should notify Congress, the Census Bureau, and key stakeholder partners in the 2020 Census—such as, but not limited to, states' Complete Counts Committees, the Census Project, Population Association of America, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice–AAJC, NAACP, and Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—of Reddit's policies regarding disinformation and misinformation about the decennial census by the end of October 2019. These policies should be clear and specific, allowing policymakers to address gaps where needed and providing key stakeholders the tools to monitor for disinformation and misinformation in the lead up to the 2020 Census.

(3) Reddit should provide access to the Reddit platform to trusted partners and include:
   a) A feed of:
      i) Suspicious new threads or subreddits, and new account activity;

ii) Suspicious sources of information, such as newly registered domains or viral, non-high-quality content; and

iii) A summary of threads, subreddits, and content that are removed from the platform

b) A tool—such as a "co-watching" Application Programming Interface—that helps partners search for relevant threads or subreddits popular with specific audience parameters and patterns of harm.

(4) Reddit should commit to producing a quarterly report on actions taken on the Reddit platform to protect the integrity of the census. This will allow researchers and policymakers to study effective counter strategies and better prepare us for future events. This reporting should include information related to the 2020 Census such as:

a) Total number of flagged or reported threads or subreddits;

b) Total number of threads or subreddits removed for fraud concerns;

c) Total number of threads or subreddits removed for disinformation concerns;

d) Sources of the misinformation and disinformation; and

e) Numbers of users who viewed or engaged with misinformation and disinformation.

(5) Reddit should commit to producing a report after the 2020 Census ends. This report should include:

a) Conclusions about how effective the actions were taken as part of (1)

b) Lessons learned from the tools provided to partners as part of (3); and

c) Data analysis and summaries from the information produced as part of (4)

A full, fair, and accurate decennial census is the cornerstone of our democracy. I, therefore, urge you and other online platforms to proactively safeguard against both inadvertent misinformation about the 2020 Census and disinformation spread by bad actors. Thank you, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that the 2020 Census provides an accurate count of the U.S. population in all communities.

Sincerely,

BRIAN SCHATZ
Ranking Member
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United States Senate

July 15, 2019

Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter Inc.
1355 Market Street
Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Dorsey:

As the 2020 Census approaches, we are concerned about the spread of misinformation, including disinformation, on many social-media platforms.[i] The highly politicized atmosphere around the decennial census leaves census takers especially vulnerable to misinformation. In 2018, the Census Bureau's then-acting director, Ron Jarmin, identified the threat of misinformation as a serious challenge to an accurate census.[ii] Online platforms play a role in both the promotion and spread of misinformation and have a responsibility to put in place effective countermeasures to prevent the spread of misinformation. I am writing in support of responsible actions your company could take to help ensure that the 2020 Census is full, fair, and accurate.

The 2020 Census is less than a year away and represents one of the greatest undertakings of our country: a constitutionally mandated count of all people in the United States.[iii] The Census Bureau has one chance to get the count right and must complete the task on time to meet constitutional and legal requirements for congressional apportionment and redistricting.

The decennial census serves an important function for our representative democracy because it forms the basis for distributing the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the states—a determination that, in turn, affects the number of Electoral College seats each state has. Census data are also used to draw congressional and state legislative district lines, thus ensuring an equal voice in our democratic system of government for every American—an ideal embodied in the 14th Amendment.

In addition, the federal government allocates over $800 billion annually in program funds to states, localities, and families based on census or census-derived data. Census data are integral to a well-functioning government and to equitable access to federal, state, and local benefits and services, and public officials cannot adequately serve their communities if those data are not accurate and comprehensive. At all levels of government, officials rely on these data to understand community needs, locate vital services, allocate resources effectively, and plan for the future.

The value of accurate and complete census data extends beyond the functions of the government. Businesses invest in job-creating initiatives—such as building new production and sales facilities—when census data demonstrate that opportunities exist in a given community. Non-

governmental organizations use census data to target their limited resources to the most vulnerable communities with the greatest need.

The 2020 Census marks the first time there will be a widely available online response option. Asking Americans to answer personal and sensitive questions online raises cybersecurity and privacy concerns, both real and perceived, by the public. The Census Bureau must ensure that a quality information technology system, a robust cybersecurity plan, and knowledgeable personnel are in place. But it must also rely on outside partners to assist in efforts to make sure the public knows that it is both safe and secure to answer the census.

The Census Bureau is already preparing to combat misinformation by ensuring that people have access to accurate information about the decennial census.[iv] However, it cannot combat misinformation on its own. Online platforms are better situated to monitor the content on their sites and to stop the spread of misinformation. The Census Bureau has begun coordinating with some online platforms, in an effort to stop disinformation campaigns and minimize the impact of misinformation.

In that effort, I recommend the following:

(1) The 2020 Census must be treated as an extraordinary circumstance warranting temporary heightened actions to ensure that it is completed in a full, fair, and accurate manner. This should include:
   a) Initiating immediate takedowns of tweets related to the 2020 Census identified as fraud, such as tweets purporting to be the Census Bureau that are phishing for users' personally identifying information;
   b) Initiating immediate takedowns of tweets related to the 2020 Census identified as disinformation;
   c) Developing clear policies to address unintentional misinformation about the 2020 Census, such as tweets claiming that federal agencies will share confidential census data; and
   d) Notifying users who have engaged with fraudulent content, misinformation, or disinformation within a timely manner.

(2) Twitter should notify Congress, the Census Bureau, and key stakeholder partners in the 2020 Census— such as, but not limited to, states' Complete Counts Committees, the Census Project, Population Association of America, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice– AAJC, NAACP, and Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—of Twitter's policies regarding disinformation and misinformation about the decennial census by the end of October 2019. These policies should be clear and specific, allowing policymakers to address gaps where needed and providing key stakeholders the tools to monitor for disinformation and misinformation in the lead up to the 2020 Census.

(3) Twitter should provide access to the Twitter platform to trusted partners and include:
   a) A feed of:
      i) Suspicious new accounts and new account activity;
      ii) Suspicious sources of information, such as newly registered domains or viral, non-high-quality content; and
      iii) A summary of accounts, networks, and content that are removed from the platform.
   b) A tool—such as a "co-watching" Application Programming Interface—that help partners search for relevant accounts popular with specific audience parameters and patterns of harm.

(4) Twitter should commit to producing a quarterly report on actions taken on the Twitter platform to protect the integrity of the census. This will allow researchers and policymakers to study effective counter strategies and better prepare us for future events. This reporting should include information related to the 2020 Census such as:
   a) Total number of flagged or reported tweets;
   b) Total number of tweets removed for fraud concerns;
   c) Total number of tweets removed for disinformation concerns;
   d) Total number times accounts were prevented from being promoted, or demoted, by the internal algorithms;
   e) Sources of the misinformation and disinformation; and
   f) Numbers of users who viewed or engaged with misinformation and disinformation.

(5) Twitter should commit to producing a report after the 2020 Census ends. This report should include:
   a) Conclusions about how effective the actions were taken as part of (1)
   b) Lessons learned from the tools provided to partners as part of (3)
   c) Data analysis and summaries from the information produced as part of (4)

A full, fair, and accurate decennial census is the cornerstone of our democracy. I, therefore, urge you and other online platforms to proactively safeguard against both inadvertent misinformation about the 2020 Census and disinformation spread by bad actors. Thank you, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that the 2020 Census provides an accurate count of the U.S. population in all communities.

Sincerely,

BRIAN SCHATZ
Ranking Member
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BRIAN SCHATZ
HAWAII

United States Senate

July 15, 2019

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

As the 2020 Census approaches, we are concerned about the spread of misinformation, including disinformation, on many social-media platforms.[i] The highly politicized atmosphere around the decennial census leaves census takers especially vulnerable to misinformation. In 2018, the Census Bureau's then-acting director, Ron Jarmin, identified the threat of misinformation as a serious challenge to an accurate census.[ii] Online platforms play a role in both the promotion and spread of misinformation and have a responsibility to put in place effective countermeasures to prevent the spread of misinformation. I am writing in support of responsible actions your company could take to help ensure that the 2020 Census is full, fair, and accurate.

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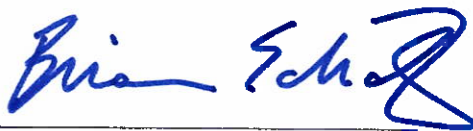
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   c) Developing clear policies to address unintentional misinformation about the 2020 Census, such as posts claiming that federal agencies will share confidential census data; and
   d) Notifying users who have engaged with fraudulent content, misinformation, or disinformation within a timely manner.

(2) Facebook should notify Congress, the Census Bureau, and key stakeholder partners in the 2020 Census—such as, but not limited to, states' Complete Counts Committees, the Census Project, Population Association of America, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC, NAACP, and Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—of Facebook's policies regarding disinformation and misinformation about the decennial census by the end of October 2019. These policies should be clear and specific, allowing policymakers to address gaps where needed and providing key stakeholders the tools to monitor for disinformation and misinformation in the lead up to the 2020 Census.

(3) Facebook should provide access to the Facebook and Instagram platforms to trusted partners and include:
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        i) Suspicious new pages and new account activity;
        ii) Suspicious sources of information, such as newly registered domains or viral, non-high-quality content; and
        iii) A summary of accounts, networks, and content that are removed from the platform.

   b) A tool—such as a "co-watching" Application Programming Interface—that:
        i) Helps partners search for relevant pages popular with specific audience parameters and patterns of harm; and
        ii) Gives access to Facebook's third-party fact-checking data feed.

(4) Facebook should commit to producing a quarterly report on actions taken on the Facebook and Instagram platforms to protect the integrity of the census. This will allow researchers and policymakers to study effective counter strategies and better prepare us for future events. This reporting should include information related to the 2020 Census such as:
   a) Total number of flagged or reported posts;
   b) Total number of posts removed for fraud concerns;
   c) Total number of posts removed for disinformation concerns;
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BRIAN SCHATZ
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