

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2019

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

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to express concern that despite Instagram's ban of gun sales on its platforms, users are nonetheless able to continue to facilitate firearm transactions by directing potential buyers to other methods of communication. We therefore request information on the steps Facebook is taking to combat gun sales facilitated through Instagram and Facebook's other platforms.

When Facebook and Instagram banned the sales of firearms on its platforms in 2016, your company took a powerful stand against unlicensed gun sales. A 2017 study estimated that two percent of firearm owners obtained their most recent firearm without undergoing a background check.¹ Another study found that the private market for gun sales "has long been recognized as a leading source of guns used in crimes."² As an industry leader, Facebook "shut down a key avenue that criminals and minors [] used to arm themselves and put lives in danger".³ This is exactly the type of common sense gun policy that enjoys broad support with the American public.

Unfortunately, it is not enough to simply ban such sales. Effective monitoring and the suspension of accounts in violation of these policies is essential. As reported in *Motherboard* earlier this month, "Some Instagram accounts make clear in their bios and posts that they are interested in selling guns, but direct users away from the app and instead encourage them to use more secure communication methods to carry out a transaction."⁴ *Motherboard* found one Instagram account that claimed to sell guns and told prospective purchasers to contact them via WhatsApp, Snapchat, or Wickr.⁵ Another account told prospective purchasers to use WhatsApp and Wickr.⁶

¹ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/>

² *Id.*

³ <https://everytown.org/press/moms-demand-action-everytown-applaud-facebook-for-bolstering-efforts-to-end-unlicensed-gun-sales-arranged-on-its-platforms/>

⁴ https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/vb94pb/gun-sellers-instagram-encrypted-messaging-apps

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

One of these accounts also advertised the sale of illegal drugs.⁷ Instagram shut down both accounts shortly after *Motherboard* notified Facebook.

While we understand that in November 2018 Facebook instituted proactive measures to better identify accounts that violate its gun sale policy⁸, we have concerns that those measures fall short. Thus, we request answers to the following questions:

1. On average, how many accounts each month, on each of Facebook and Instagram are suspended for violating the gun sale policy?
2. What measures does Facebook have in place to ensure that if an account is suspended for violating the gun sale policy, that user cannot create another account under a different username?
3. What proactive measures is Facebook taking to ensure that users are not able to skirt Facebook's ban on gun sales, including by referring potential buyers to apps such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Wickr, or any alternative communication platform?
4. What policies does Facebook have in place to alert law enforcement to instances of gun trafficking on its platforms?
5. How does Facebook handle reports from users alerting it to possible instances of gun sales? On average how many instances of gun sales are flagged by other users each month?
6. How is Facebook working with peer companies to address the issue of private online gun sales?

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



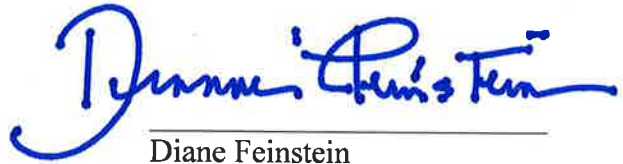
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

⁷ *Id.*

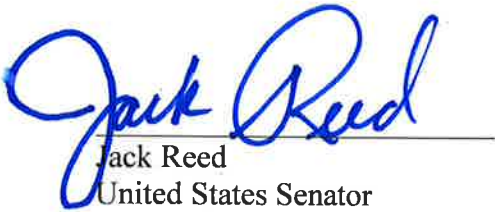
⁸ *Id.*



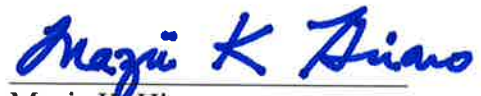
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



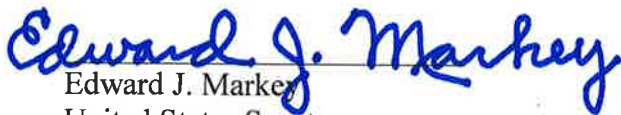
Diane Feinstein
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



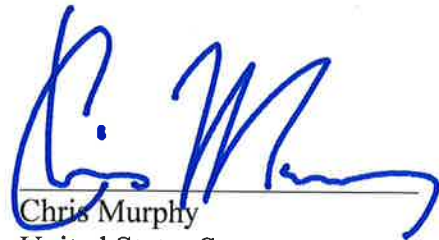
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Chris Murphy
United States Senator