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Chairman Dick Durbin
Ranking Member Lindsey Graham
Senate Judiciary Committee
United States Senate
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

February 2nd, 2024

Dear Chair Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

As you know, ADL (Anti-Defamation League) has been a leader in the fight against hate and antisemitism for over a century, rooted in and drawing upon the lived experience of a community relentlessly targeted by extremists, bigots, and other bad actors. Since 2017, the ADL Center for Tech & Society (CTS) has provided unique expertise because of ADL's work at the intersection of civil rights, extremism, and tech.

We are grateful that the Senate Judiciary Committee continues to explore avenues to curb the ongoing proliferation of online child sexual abuse material (CSAM), as platforms continue to struggle to rein in or even prove that they are slowing down circulation.¹ In this tenuous moment, the explosion of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) looms as an accelerant for one of the oldest and most intractable problems created by the internet.² We appreciate the committee's effort to address online CSAM by considering a suite of bills including the [STOP CSAM Act](#), the [EARN IT Act](#), the [SHIELD Act](#), the [Project Safe Childhood Act](#), and the [REPORT Act](#). However, these bills and others intended to protect children online should go beyond CSAM to also include the pervasive hate and harassment faced by these platforms' most vulnerable consumers. Among the research initiatives at CTS is the Online Hate & Harassment (OHH) Survey, a nationally representative annual survey to understand how many American adults experience hate or harassment on social media. The 2022 and 2023 editions of the OHH survey also included nationally representative samples of teenagers aged 13-17, positioning CTS well to comment on platforms' inability or unwillingness to protect young adults from identity-based hate and harassment.³

¹ Washington Post article "Child sex images are booming online. Congress wants to know why." (January 2024) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/01/28/csam-ncmec-senate-hearing-child-porn/>

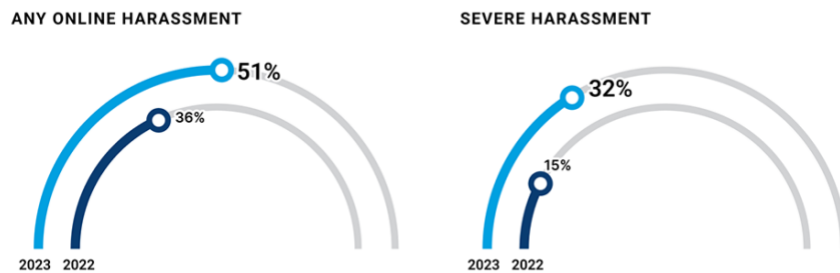
² Stanford Internet Observatory study "Identifying and Eliminating CSAM in Generative ML Training Data and Models" (December 2023) <https://purl.stanford.edu/kh752sm9123>

³ CTS report "Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2023" (June 2023) https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-12/Online-Hate-and-Harassmen-2023_0_0.pdf

In the 2023 edition of the OHH Survey, CTS found that 51% of the 550 teenagers interviewed experienced some form of online harassment in the preceding twelve months—a 15 percentage point increase from the 2022 edition of the survey, and an increase 5 points greater than the year-over-year increase reported by adults. 32% of teenagers surveyed also reported facing severe harassment, a 17-percentage point increase from the 2022 results.

Teenagers Experienced a Sharp Rise in Online Harassment

Share of teenagers who experienced online harassment in the previous 12 months

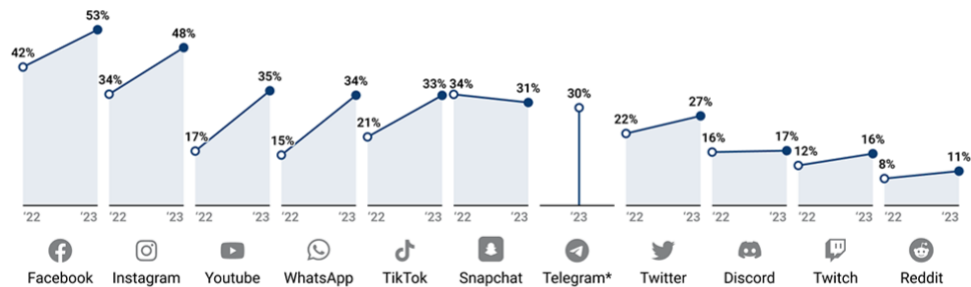


Source: YouGov Survey on behalf of ADL

The graphic below, reproduced from the survey, demonstrates that when results were sorted by platform, harassment of teenagers increased from 2022 to 2023 on almost every entity that recently appeared before the Committee.

Harassment Increased for Teens on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok

Share of teenagers who experienced any type of online harassment on the following platforms in the previous 12 months



Source: YouGov Survey on behalf of ADL. *2023 was the first year the survey asked teens about Telegram.

Overall, reports of each type of hate and harassment increased by nearly every measure and within almost every demographic group. Among the most troubling insights we derived specifically from the teenage respondents was that 47% who indicated they were harassed online in the past 12 months reported subsequent online/in-person harassment.

While identity-based harassment of teenagers is not as gut-wrenching as CSAM exploiting young children, our data demonstrate that any discussion of platform safety and the dangers of being online for young people is incomplete without discussing the pervasiveness of severe harassment. Meta Platforms, for example, is being sued by multiple attorneys general for knowingly designing and deploying features that harm young users' mental health.⁴ As such, we urge all members of the committee to redouble their efforts to rein in big tech while also maintaining a wide view of the multidimensional nature of platforms' adverse impact on young users. ADL has endorsed the bipartisan [Platform Accountability and Transparency Act \(PATA\)](#) re-introduced in the 118th Congress by Senator Coons. The transparency provisions of PATA would provide a data-driven understanding of the effects platforms are having on young users' well-being.

ADL is appreciative of the committee's leadership on these complex and important issues, indicative of the bipartisan commitment to protecting children online. We are glad to see the committee using whatever means necessary to compel testimony from these platforms as they continue to rake in record profits while failing to mitigate the dangers their products pose to vulnerable users. ADL looks forward to continued work on these issues with the committee.

Sincerely,

Max Sevillia

Senior Vice President, National Affairs

Anti-Defamation League

⁴ The Hill article "Zuckerberg 'vetoed,' 'ignored' plans to boost teen well-being on Meta platforms, lawsuit alleges" (Nov 2023) <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/4302145-zuckerberg-vetoed-teen-mental-health-facebook-instagram>