



Mark Zuckerberg, CEO
Sheryl Sandberg, COO
Facebook
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA
94025

May 22, 2017

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg and Ms. Sandberg:

I am writing on behalf of Consumer Watchdog to ask that Facebook take immediate steps to halt child sex-trafficking via the Internet and immediately support necessary amendments to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act that would allow such cynical businesses as Backpage.com to be held accountable for actively aiding and abetting child sex trafficking. By one count 73% of child trafficking reports in the United States involve Backpage.com. Backpage hides behind the cloak of Sec. 230 while too many in the tech industry blindly and reflexively claim that needed amendments would undermine Internet freedom. Do not fall victim to this spurious claim.

Action on your part now would be particularly timely; Congress has designated this week as “Combatting Trafficking and Child Protection Week” and expects to focus on the issue. Rep. Anne Wagner, R-Mo., has introduced H.R. 1865, the “Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017.” It could well be the vehicle that would finally allow Backpage to be held accountable.

Just last week Consumer Watchdog, DeliverFund, Faith and Freedom Coalition, The Rebecca Project for Justice, Trafficking in America Taskforce and Nacole S., a sex-trafficking victim’s mother, released a comprehensive report detailing Backpage’s wrongful activities and how Google has spent millions to fund efforts to thwart any changes in Section 230. (<http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/resources/backpagereport.pdf>) As detailed in the report, primary recipients of Google’s largess are two nonprofit organizations, The Center for Digital Democracy (CDT) and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF). As documented in the report, CDT and EFF have frequently jumped to aid Backpage as it faced various legal challenges.

Nacole S. expressed the desire to meet with you so that she can explain the harm that unquestioning support for CDA Sec. 230 causes. You may view the news conference about the study here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjUsU02rzHM>

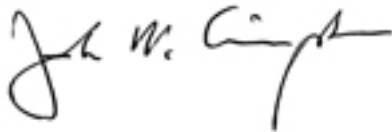
Facebook has recently emerged as key player in Washington in lobbying on behalf of the tech industry. Lobbying disclosure reports filed with the Clerk of the House of Representatives show you spent a record \$3.21 million lobbying in the first quarter of 2017, compared to \$2.78 million in 2016. Your lobbying outlay now nearly matches the amount Internet giant Google spends: \$3.52 million in 2017’s first quarter, and \$3.8 million in 2016.

Google, CDT and EFF, may claim to be protecting free speech and Internet freedom, but their activities have done little more than protect a notorious sex-trafficking hub from being held accountable by its victims. Backpage's abuses and the fight by its victims to hold it accountable are the subject of a new documentary film, *I am Jane Doe*. (<http://www.iamjanedofilm.com>) Watch it. You can download it from Google Play, iTunes or Amazon. We predict you'll clearly understand the abuses that blind defense of Sec. 230 enables. We call on you not to spend your money lobbying in the name of Internet freedom that results in protecting a sex-trafficking hub, Backpage.com.

Section 230 of the CDA provides that a website can't be held liable for what's posted on its site by others. This promotes free speech on the Internet, which is vital to our democracy. It has protected your business model. Internet freedom, however, must not come at the expense of children who are sex trafficked. Just as the First Amendment does not allow you to shout fire in a crowded movie house, or to assist hit men and drug dealers in their criminal activity, CDA Section 230 must not be allowed to protect an exploitative business that is built on child sex trafficking.

We call on you to support a narrow amendment to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, -- H.R. 1865, the "Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act" could be the vehicle -- that would allow Backpage to be held accountable for its ongoing facilitating of child sex trafficking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Simpson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John M. Simpson
Privacy Project Director