



March 25, 2021

The Honorable Michael F. Doyle
Chair, Subcommittee on
Communications and Technology
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
Chair, Subcommittee on
Consumer Protection and Commerce
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert E. Latta
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Communications and Technology
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gus M. Bilirakis
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Consumer Protection and Commerce
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Doyle, Schakowsky, Latta, and Bilirakis:

New America's Open Technology Institute (OTI) appreciates the opportunity to submit a statement for the record for the joint hearing entitled, "Disinformation Nation: Social Media's Role in Promoting Extremism and Misinformation" being held by the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology and the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce. OTI works at the intersection of technology and policy to ensure that every community has equitable access to digital technologies that are open and secure, and their benefits. We support and defend the right to privacy and freedom of expression, and recognize the online and offline harm that misinformation and disinformation surrounding COVID-19¹ and the 2020 presidential election² have disproportionately had on communities of color and already marginalized groups.

With regard to combating misinformation and disinformation, we press internet platforms to provide greater transparency and accountability around their policies, technologies, and actions. In June 2020, OTI released a report which outlines how eight internet platforms responded to the spread of COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation. The report makes recommendations on how internet platforms can provide greater transparency around these efforts, and how policymakers can encourage greater accountability from these platforms.³ Additionally, in order to examine the harmful effects that

¹ J. Jaiswal, C. LoSchivo, and D.C. Perlman, *Disinformation, Misinformation and Inequality-Driven Mistrust in the Time of COVID-19: Lessons Unlearned from AIDS Denialism*, May 21, 2020
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7241063/>

² Shannon Bond, *Black and Latino Voters Flooded With Disinformation In Election's Final Days*, October 30, 2020
<https://www.npr.org/2020/10/30/929248146/black-and-latino-voters-flooded-with-disinformation-in-elections-final-days>

³ Spandana Singh and Koustubh "K.J." Bagchi, *How Internet Platforms Are Combating Disinformation and Misinformation in the Age of COVID-19*, June 1, 2020,
<https://www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/how-internet-platforms-are-combating-disinformation-and-misinformation-age-covid-19/>.

misinformation and disinformation had on our electoral processes, OTI released a report that analyzes how ten internet platforms responded to election and voter suppression-related misinformation and disinformation in the run up to the election. The report provides substantive recommendations for how platforms can stem the tide of election misinformation and disinformation.⁴

This past year, we have seen the real world impact of online disinformation and misinformation. Furthermore, organized efforts, including the January 6 attacks on the Capitol, continue to promote distrust in our democratic institutions. It is therefore vital that the public is armed with accurate and reliable information. Misinformation and disinformation have the power to uproot democracy and democratic values, and internet platforms must do more to combat the spread of this harmful content. These companies must also provide greater transparency and accountability around these efforts, in order to ensure that they are safeguarding user rights and acting in the best interest of the public.

Please find attached OTI's reports entitled, "Protecting the Vote" and "How Internet Platforms Are Combating Disinformation and Misinformation in the Age of COVID-19" referenced above. Thank you for your leadership on these issues. We are happy to discuss any of the points raised in this submission further with you or your staff.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this statement for the hearing record.

Sincerely,



Koustubh "K.J." Bagchi
Senior Policy Counsel



Spandana Singh
Policy Analyst

⁴ Spandana Singh and Margerite Blase, *Protecting the Vote*, September 30, 2020
<https://www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/protecting-vote/>