



April 24, 2019

Chairman Max Rose
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism
H2-176 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rose,

Thank you for your letter dated April 10 requesting information about YouTube's investment in its counter-terrorism programs. At YouTube, we value the openness that our platform has created. It has democratized how stories and whose stories get told. We are aware, however, that the very platforms that have enabled these societal benefits may be abused by those who wish to promote hatred or extremism. These challenges are constantly evolving and changing, so our commitment to combat them is similarly sustained and unwavering.

Five hundred hours of video are uploaded every minute to YouTube, and there are over 2 billion visits to the site per month. Our content moderation efforts to respond to this scale are both broad and cross-sectional. We use a mix of technology and humans to remove violative content quickly. These efforts, and their resources, are used across platforms, teams, and issue areas — ranging from the annoying, like spam, to the criminal, like child pornography.

This is why, as is sometimes the case with government budgets, it is difficult and possibly misleading for us to disaggregate our counter-terrorism efforts from overall expenditures to protect our domain. It would require a lot of assumptions of partial allocations. Depending on the needs, we may shift personnel from other focus areas to review terrorist content or vice-versa. We also have many horizontal teams that contribute to the broader infrastructure needed to support all controversial content areas. This infrastructure includes, but is not limited to, our heavy investment in artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies that are used across many applications.

We agree with you that a budget is a statement of values. Google's operating expenses (excluding cost of revenues) in 2018 were \$50.9 billion.¹ At present, we spend hundreds of millions of dollars annually and have more than 10,000 people working across Google to address content that might violate our policies, which include our policies against promoting violence and terrorism.

¹ https://abc.xyz/investor/static/pdf/20180204_alphabet_10K.pdf?cache=11336e3

In Q1 2019, YouTube manually reviewed over 1M suspected terrorist videos and found that only fewer than 10% (90K videos) violated our terrorism policy. Even though the amount of content we remove for terrorism is low compared to the overall amount our users and algorithms flag, we invest in reviewing all of it out of an abundance of caution.

We typically remove between 7 and 9 million videos per quarter, which is a fraction of a percent of YouTube's total views during this time period. Most of these videos were first flagged for review by our automated systems. Over 90% of violent extremist videos that were uploaded and removed in the past 6 months (Q4 '18 & Q1 '19) were removed before receiving a single human flag, and of those, 88% had fewer than ten views.

We also hire experts with relevant government and academic experience to help us better understand the problem. They hail from institutions like Centcom, the State Department, and the FBI and have worked on terrorism across the ideological spectrum. Our Intel Desk, for example, is staffed by former intel professionals and data analysts and run by the former Deputy of the FBI's Intelligence Division, who briefs YouTube's senior executives on the new risks weekly, including CEO Susan Wojcicki. This team helps us detect emerging trends in how people and organizations are manipulating platforms across the internet to spread hate and terror. The Intel Desk identifies new trends in harmful content by synthesizing leads from third party intel vendors, internal trend data, social listening, and other relevant inputs.

Finally, we go beyond enforcing our policies by creating programs to promote counterspeech on our platforms to present narratives and elevate the voices that are most credible in speaking out against hate, violence, and terrorism. For example, our Creators for Change program supports creators who are tackling tough issues, including extremism and hate, by building empathy and acting as positive role models. There are 60 million video views of Creators for Change content to date; 731,000 total watch time hours of Creators for Change content; and through "Local chapters" of Creators for Change, creators tackle challenges specific to different markets. Similarly, Google's Jigsaw group, an incubator to tackle some of the toughest global security challenges, has deployed the Redirect Method, which uses Adwords targeting tools and curated YouTube playlists to disrupt online radicalization. The method is open to anyone to use, and we know NGOs have sponsored campaigns against a wide-spectrum of ideologically motivated terrorists.

As terrorism evolves, YouTube will continue to invest in the people and technology to meet the challenge. We value your leadership in this area and look forward to continuing the dialogue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William McCants", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William McCants
Global Public Policy Lead for Hate Speech and Terrorism, Google

CC: Representative Sheila Jackson Lee
Representative James Langevin
Representative Elissa Slotkin