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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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February 26, 2020

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

I am contacting you regarding efforts to combat disinformation and misinformation about the 2020 Census. The outcome of the Decennial Census is crucial for every individual and family. It will help determine the allocation of resources for health care, education, infrastructure, and other community needs, as well as representation in Congress. Each household must be able to easily and confidently respond to the census knowing that their personal information is safe and their participation is important.

A significant threat to the census is the spread of incorrect information that could dissuade people from responding: both disinformation disseminated by bad actors, potentially including foreign adversaries, as well as misinformation unwittingly circulated by well-meaning individuals. I am concerned about any inaccurate information that would discourage responses, such as misrepresentations about how individuals can participate, who is eligible to participate, or misleading statements that imply there will be negative consequences for participating.

As you know, the Census Bureau has established a "Trust and Safety Team" that coordinates with private sector technology and social media platforms like yours, as well as with partner and stakeholder organizations, and cybersecurity officials to protect the 2020 Census and ensure the public receives accurate information. This team will monitor "available channels and open platforms for misinformation and disinformation about the census" while working with partners and stakeholders to quickly respond to any identified issues. The Census Bureau is also encouraging the public to report suspicious information to rumors@census.gov to help ensure the Bureau can respond quickly and appropriately to false 2020 Census information.

I understand you are working with the Census Bureau in its efforts to combat the spread of disinformation and misinformation. In December 2019, Google announced that it “expanded its existing deceptive practices policy” on YouTube to explicitly cover the census, and clarified its advertising policy “to explicitly prohibit ads featuring incorrect information about how to participate in the census.” It also stated Google will “share actionable information with other companies, law enforcement and the U.S. Census Bureau to help investigate, identify and resolve relevant issues.”¹

I am encouraged to know that you are working with the Bureau and would like to request additional information to better understand your efforts to ensure disinformation and misinformation are addressed quickly and effectively to protect individuals and families who will take part in the census.

Your company is in a unique position to support the Bureau’s fight against disinformation and misinformation throughout the 2020 Census, including during efforts to raise awareness before the census; during the self-response operation beginning in March, where every household will be urged to respond; and during the Nonresponse Follow-up operation in May through July, when enumerators will visit non-responding households. It is essential that Congress and the public understand this crucial census operation, and your company plays a key role.

To better understand how you are working to detect and prevent disinformation and misinformation and ensure individuals and families can have confidence in a complete and accurate census, I request your response to the following questions by March 12, 2020:

- What processes and procedures have you developed for ensuring information sharing and feedback between your company and the Bureau’s Trust and Safety team to help combat disinformation and misinformation, including:
 - a. processes and procedures for sharing useful information and analysis about observed disinformation and misinformation; and
 - b. processes and procedures for coordinating public communications with the Bureau, to ensure timely and organized responses to disinformation and misinformation threats?
- How do you plan to inform the public about measures they can take to combat misinformation and disinformation on your platforms?

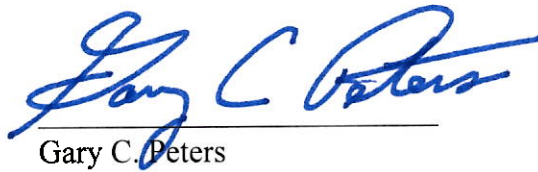
¹ Google, *How Google and YouTube are Working to Protect the 2020 U.S. Census* (Dec. 11, 2019) (www.blog.google/technology/safety-security/how-google-and-youtube-are-working-protect-2020-us-census).

- Are you taking any additional measures to encourage public participation in the 2020 Census?
- What steps have you taken to help civil society organizations, state and local governments, or other partners identify misinformation and disinformation on your platforms?
- What training are you offering for relevant employees on your census-specific policies, to ensure consistent implementation across your platforms?

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate “the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”² Additionally, Senate Resolution 70 (116th Congress) authorizes the Committee to investigate “the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches of the Government.”³

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

² S. Rule XXV, clause (k)(2)(B); *see also* S. Res 445, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess. (2004).

³ S. Res 70, 116th Cong., §12(e)(1)(A), 1st Sess. (2019) (enacted).