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April 9, 2021

RE: **Opposition to HB 1647 unfair trade practices for social media websites**

We respectfully ask that you **not** advance HB 1647, because it:

- Impedes the ability of platforms to remove objectionable content; and
- Makes it legally risky to block SPAM messages.

HB 1647 discourages the moderation of objectionable and extremist content and will result in many of the problems we outline below.

HB 1647 impedes the ability of websites and platforms to remove objectionable content

Today, online websites and platforms take significant steps to remove objectionable content from their sites. In just the last six months of 2018, Facebook, Google, and Twitter took action on over 5 billion accounts and posts.¹ This includes the removal of 57 million instances of pornography and 17 million instances of content related to child safety.

Yet the removal of content related to extremism, pornography, and child safety is impeded by HB 1647.

This is because it forces platforms to set explicit criteria they will use “in determining whether to disable or suspend a user's social media website account” and to notify users with an explanation of why their account was taken down in the case of a removal. This locks social media platforms into an explicit, before-the-fact content moderation regime and limits their ability to respond quickly and effectively in the face of emerging threats and changing circumstances.

Imagine an extremist group making posts that simply read, “Join us to help America.” Blocking or removing their account would be more difficult under HB 1647, as platforms likely would not have criteria that specifically prohibit this type of content.

There are also things like the “Tide Pod Challenge” and the “Salt and Ice Challenge” that may not clearly violate any specific standard set by the platforms, but still need to be moderated since they put the safety of children at considerable risk. The provisions in this bill would make it harder for platforms to respond rapidly as these dangerous and objectionable movements emerge.

¹ See *Transparency Report*, at <http://netchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/Transparency-Report.pdf>

The end result is that websites and platforms will err on the side of leaving up lewd, lascivious, dangerous, and extremist speech and content, making the internet a much more objectionable place to be.

Moreover, users are already protected from unfair trade practices and the government can currently bring suits against the platforms if they truly believe these companies are engaging in unfair practices.

HB 1647 makes it difficult for providers to block SPAM

Today, platforms engage in robust content blocking of SPAM. But this blocking of not only unwanted but invasive content would be far more difficult under HB 1647, as it would need to violate some explicit criteria previously set by the specific platform at issue.

For decades, service providers have fought bad actors to keep our services usable. Through blocking of IP and email addresses along with removing content with harmful keywords, our services are more useful and user friendly. But services couldn't do this type of blocking under HB 1647 unless they had specific criteria that cover the content in question.²

Defenders of the bill may argue that platforms could still adopt a standard that broadly prohibits SPAM, but then each case of removal would subject the platforms to legal action based on the specific facts and content at issue. SPAM is not uniform in nature and can be difficult to clearly define. As such, platforms would likely err on the side of leaving up more SPAM than they would otherwise.

Diminishing platforms' ability to remove SPAM content would contradict Congress's intent to "remove disincentives for the development and utilization of blocking and filtering technologies."³

Because it restricts the ability of social media websites to moderate objectionable content and block SPAM, we respectfully ask you to **oppose HB 1647**.

We appreciate your consideration of our views, and please let us know if we can provide further information.

Sincerely,

Steve DelBianco
President and CEO
NetChoice

NetChoice works to make the Internet safe for free enterprise and free expression. www.netchoice.org

² See, e.g. *Holomaxx Technologies Corp. v. Microsoft*, 783 F. Supp. 2d 1097 (N.D. Cal. 2011) (an email marketer sued Microsoft, claiming that the SPAM blocking filtering technology Microsoft employed was tortious).

³ *Id.* at 1105 (citing 47 U.S.C. § 230(b)(4)).