

October 12, 2023

The Honorable Lina M. Khan
Chairwoman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Chairwoman Khan,

I write today in support of my constituent, Mr. Andy Parker, and his urgent requests for the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to take action against Google and Meta over their failure to remove videos depicting the tragic murders of Alison Parker and Adam Ward from YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. In light of this behavior, we ask that your agency engage closely with Mr. Parker regarding his complaints and explore all possible avenues to ensure that Google and Meta uphold their Terms of Service in relation to violent and harmful content.

In August 2015, journalist Alison Parker and photojournalist Adam Ward were shot and killed during a live television interview in Moneta, Virginia. Following this horrifying event, footage captured by the assailant, as well as video from the live news broadcast, were uploaded to several online platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Despite the platforms having policies banning violent content and repeated requests from Mr. Parker and volunteers acting on his behalf to remove this distressing footage, these videos continue to exist on all three platforms to this day. Even more troubling, the footage has been circulated widely by conspiracy theorists who subject the victims' families to further harm and harassment by falsely claiming the attack was a hoax.

While both Google and Meta purport to have robust content moderation protocols, Mr. Parker's experience demonstrates that the responsibility of removing harmful content often falls upon the victims' families. It is my understanding that Google responded to Mr. Parker's complaints by directing him to flag and report each individual video of the attack on YouTube. Further, Instagram's policy states, "If you see a video or picture on Instagram that depicts the violent death of a family member, you can ask us to remove it. Once we've been notified, we will remove that specific piece of content."¹ I am deeply troubled by this response, as the burden of finding and removing harmful content should not fall to victims' families who are grieving their loved ones. This approach only serves to retraumatize them and inflict additional pain. Instead, I firmly believe that the responsibility lies solely with the platform to ensure that any content violating its own Terms of Service is removed expeditiously.

¹ <https://help.instagram.com/1178793262898623>

For years, volunteers from the Coalition For A Safer Web have reported videos of Alison's murder and requested repeatedly for the videos to be taken down on Mr. Parker's behalf. Disturbingly, only some of the flagged videos have been removed, with many still viewable on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. While Meta has responded that it removed certain videos from Facebook and Instagram, there are still clear violations of their Terms of Service present on their platforms, with videos of Alison Parker's murder, filmed by the perpetrator, still accessible on Instagram. While YouTube appears to have more thoroughly removed content of Alison Parker's murder filmed by the perpetrator, content containing disturbing footage of the moment of attack is widespread. Through the continued hosting of videos showing the heinous attack on Alison Parker and Adam Ward and other violence, these platforms fail to provide users with an experience free of harmful content despite claiming to do so.

It has been over three years since Mr. Parker and the Georgetown University Law Clinic filed their first complaint regarding this case, and Mr. Parker continues to endure harassment as a result of the videos remaining on these platforms. Given the practices outlined above, I ask that your agency consider all possible avenues to ensure that companies like Google and Meta uphold their Terms of Service, not only in Mr. Parker's case but also in other instances where their platforms may host violent and harmful content. Further, I ask that you engage closely with Mr. Parker as you consider this request and provide him with a prompt response to his complaints.

I look forward to further engagement with you regarding Mr. Parker's complaints. Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark R. Warner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator