HEARING BEFORE
THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, COMMERCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION,
PRODUCT SAFETY, AND DATA SECURITY

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I. Introduction

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Blackburn, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Antigone Davis, and I have served as the Global Head of Safety at Facebook for the past seven years.

I have dedicated the better part of my adult life to protecting the safety and well-being of young people. Before coming to Facebook, I worked as a middle school teacher and spent a decade working for the Office of the Maryland Attorney General, helping to establish the office's first online privacy and safety unit. I serve on the boards of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Technology Coalition, two organizations dedicated to fighting child sexual exploitation. I previously served on the boards of the National Cybersecurity Alliance, the Family Online Safety Institute, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, the National Center for the Victims of Crime, and the International Advisory Board for WePROTECT, a global alliance working to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online.

In my role at Facebook, I lead the global team responsible for ensuring that Facebook remains a leader in online safety. This work is core to our mission of designing and building products that bring people together. We want our platforms to be a place for meaningful interactions with friends and family, and we cannot achieve that goal if people do not feel safe. My team works tirelessly with our colleagues across the company to put in place the right policies, products, and precautions so that the people who use our services have a safe and positive experience. We also know that Facebook can't do this work alone. As part of my role, I coordinate the efforts of Facebook's Safety Advisory Board, a team of leading safety organizations from around the world who provide Facebook with cutting-edge research and advice on best practices, particularly relating to young people and other vulnerable groups. I also lead our work with our Youth Advisors, our advisory group on suicide prevention, and a global safety network of more than 850 organizations around the world.

The work that I do at Facebook is some of the most important of my career, and I am incredibly proud of the work that my team does every day to protect the safety of the people who use our platforms.

II. Protecting and Supporting Young People On Our Platforms

In my role, I am especially focused on the safety and well-being of the youngest people who use our services. This work includes keeping underage users off our platform, as well as ensuring that we are taking a comprehensive approach to protecting the youngest people allowed on our services. This work also includes partnering with product teams to address serious issues like child exploitation, suicide and self-harm, and bullying; developing programs and resources to support parents, children, and educators; and working with researchers and other experts to help us understand how social media impacts people so we can use that research to improve our products.

A. Keeping People Under 13 Off Our Platforms

If a child is under the age of 13, they are not allowed on Facebook or Instagram and should not be using those services. When we learn an underage user has created an account, we remove them from the platform. From June to August of this year, in part due to some of the investments described below, we removed over 600,000 accounts on Instagram alone that were unable to meet our minimum age requirement.

Understanding people's age on the internet is a complex and industry-wide challenge, but we are doing extensive work to understand if people are old enough to use our apps and to create more age-appropriate experiences and safety measures for young people. In addition to asking for people's date of birth when they register and allowing anyone to report a suspected underage account, we have developed technology that allows us to estimate people's ages, for example, whether someone is younger or older than 18, and we're building similar technology to find and remove accounts belonging to people under the age of 13. We train the technology using multiple signals. We look at things like people wishing a user a happy birthday and the age written in those messages—for example, "Happy 21st Bday!" or "Happy Quinceañera." This technology isn't perfect, and we're always working to improve it, but that's why it's important that we use it alongside many other signals to understand people's ages.

While not allowed on Facebook and Instagram, children under 13 are allowed on Messenger Kids, a product that we introduced in 2017. We built Messenger Kids because we heard from parents that there was need for a messaging app that let kids connect while ensuring that parents and guardians had control over the experience. And we designed Messenger Kids with input from thousands of parents and experts, and with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act in mind.

B. Product Safety Enhancements for Teens

We are also dedicated to protecting the youngest people on our services. We have put in place multiple protections to create safe and age-appropriate experiences for people between the ages of 13 and 17.

Whenever we can, we want to prevent young people from interacting with adults they don't know or don't want to engage with. We believe private accounts are the best way to do this, and

we recently announced that all users under the age of 16 in the US will now be defaulted into a private account when they join Instagram. For young people who already have a public account on Instagram, we are sharing a notification highlighting the benefits of a private account and explaining how to change their privacy settings. On Facebook, we encourage young people to make their accounts private by defaulting their posting audience to "friends" and by providing education before allowing them to post publicly. We've developed these unique education moments in consultation with experts.

In addition to our work on moving teenagers towards private accounts, we have taken additional steps to protect their safety. Earlier this year, we changed Instagram's direct messaging feature to prevent adults from sending messages to people under 18 who don't follow them. We have also begun using prompts, or safety notices, to encourage teens to be cautious in conversations with adults they're already connected to. Safety notices in direct messages will notify young people when an adult who has been exhibiting potentially suspicious behavior is trying to interact with them. On Facebook, we remove certain information when young people appear in a search (such as their school), and we do not allow them to appear in 'People You May Know' for adults who have been exhibiting potentially suspicious behavior. On Instagram, we prevent adults who have exhibited potentially suspicious behavior from interacting with young people's accounts. We won't show young people's accounts in Explore, Reels, or 'Accounts Suggested for You' to these adults. If they find young people's accounts by searching for their usernames, they won't be able to follow them. They also won't be able to see comments from young people on other people's posts, nor will they be able to leave comments on young people's posts.

We also work to create age-appropriate experiences for teenagers on Facebook and Instagram. This includes age-gating certain content, prohibiting certain types of ads from being served to minors, and limiting options for serving any ads to these users. For example, we have long restricted what kinds of ads can be served to minors, and we recently limited options for serving any ads to people under 18. Now, people under 18 can only have ads served to them based on age, gender, and location, but not interests or activity.

We've also introduced new ways to support people on Instagram who may be affected by negative body image or an eating disorder, including surfacing more expert-backed resources when people search for eating disorder-related content, expanding our work with experts to help inform our policies, and collaborating with community leaders to help them create and share positive, inspiring body image content.

C. Parental Resources and Controls

We think it is important to help provide parents and guardians the information, resources, and tools they need to set parameters for their teenagers' use of online technologies and to help them develop healthy and safe online habits. We have been working on parental resources for many years, and this week we announced a significant step forward by bringing parental supervision for teens to Instagram in the coming months. This feature, which parents and teens can opt into, will give parents additional tools to help shape their teens' experience.

This latest announcement builds on years of work to provide parents with resources to help them navigate conversations with their teenagers. As part of our Safety Center, we have a Parent Portal (https://www.facebook.com/safety/parents), a Youth Portal (https://www.facebook.com/safety/youth), and a Child Safety Hub (https://www.facebook.com/safety/childsafety), all of which are focused on fostering conversations around online safety, security, and well-being. These portals give parents and young people access to the information and resources they need to make informed decisions about their online technology use. We also worked with The Child Mind Institute and ConnectSafely to publish a new Parents Guide (https://about.instagram.com/community/parents) with the latest safety tools and privacy settings and a list of tips and conversation starters to help parents and guardians navigate discussions with their teens about their online presence. We also worked with the Digital Wellness Lab team on a Family Digital Wellness Guide to help families learn about the media-related health issues that are top of mind for parents today; it includes tips that are practical, easy, and based in science.

And we don't just focus on our own apps. We've also developed a free digital literacy program called Get Digital. It has research-based lessons and resources that will help young people develop the skills they need to become empowered and discerning digital citizens. Get Digital provides educators, parents, and caregivers with lesson plans and activities designed to help build the core competencies and skills young people need to navigate the digital world in safe ways.

III. Using Research to Improve People's Experience

We understand that recent reporting has raised a lot of questions about our internal research, including research we do to better understand young people's experiences on Instagram. We strongly disagree with how this reporting characterized our work, so we want to be clear about what that research shows, and what it does not show.

In addition to putting specific findings in context, it is also critical to make the nature of this research clear. We undertook this work to inform internal conversations about teens' most negative perceptions of Instagram. It did not measure causal relationships between Instagram and real-world issues. The reporting also implied that the results were surprising and that we hid this research. That is also not true. We have talked about the strengths and weaknesses of social media and well-being publicly for more than a decade, and external researchers have, too. For example, a survey and interviews from Harvard found that teens viewed social media "predominantly" positively, though they reported both positive and negative impacts on their relationships and self-expression. And a Pew Internet survey reported the majority of teens credit social media for positive outcomes—81% said it helps them connect—while some also pointed to its negative impacts—43% said they felt pressure to post things that make them "look good."

Our research showed that many teens who are struggling say that Instagram helps them deal with many of the hard issues that are so common to being a teen. In fact, one of the main presentations referenced by the *Wall Street Journal* included a survey of twelve issues—difficult and serious issues like loneliness, anxiety, sadness, and eating disorders. If a teenager shared that they were struggling with an issue, we asked whether Instagram was making things better,

worse, or having no effect. For eleven of the twelve issues, teen girls who were struggling were more likely to say that Instagram was affirmatively helping them than making things worse. That was true for teen boys on twelve out of twelve issues.

I'd like to highlight a few other details from the research that the *Wall Street Journal* failed to include:

- Among those teenage girls who said they had felt sadness in the past month, 57% said Instagram made things better, and 34% said Instagram had no impact. 9% said Instagram made it worse.
- Among those teenage girls who said they had experienced loneliness in the past month, 51% said Instagram made things better, and 36% said Instagram had no impact. 13% said Instagram made it worse.
- Among those teenage girls who said they had experienced anxiety in the past month, 40% said Instagram made things better, and 48% said it made no difference. 12% said Instagram made things worse.
- 38% of teenage girls who said they struggled with suicidal thoughts and self-harm said Instagram made these issues better for them, and 49% said it has no impact.

I want to be clear that we are not diminishing the importance of these issues or suggesting that we will ever be satisfied if *anyone* is struggling on our product. It's why we conduct this research: to make our platforms better, to minimize the bad and maximize the good, and to proactively identify where we can improve. And the most important thing about our research is what we've done with it. We have a long track record of using our research—as well as external research and close collaboration with our Safety Advisory Board, Youth Advisors, and additional experts and organizations—to inform changes to our apps and provide resources for the people who use them. We've built AI to identify suicide-related content on our platform and rapidly respond with resources. We've launched tools to help control time spent on our apps. We've built a dedicated reporting option for eating disorder-related content, and we pop up resources when people try to search for it. And our work to respond to this research is ongoing. We are looking into ways to encourage users to consider different content if they are consuming content that correlates with negative appearance comparison. Another idea we are exploring is "take a break," a feature that allows you to set a session time limit to take a moment away from scrolling.

We'll continue to look for ways to be more transparent while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants and giving our researchers space to do their work. We will also be looking for more opportunities to work with more partners to publish independent studies while also working through how we can allow external researchers more access to our data in a way that respects people's privacy.

IV. Stepping Back from Instagram for Tweens and Announcing Parental Supervision

Finally, I want to speak to our work on an Instagram experience for tweens. As every parent knows, the reality is that kids and tweens are already online. They're getting phones younger and younger, misrepresenting their age, and downloading apps that are meant for those 13 or older.

We believe that it is better for parents to have the option to give tweens access to a version of Instagram that is designed for them—where parents can supervise and control their experience—than to have them lie about their age to access a platform that wasn't built for them.

That's why we have been working on delivering experiences like Instagram for tweens that are age-appropriate and give parents and guardians visibility and control over what their tweens are doing online. Other companies also have recognized these types of issues and built experiences for kids. YouTube and TikTok both have versions of their app for those under 13. The principle is the same: it's much better for kids to use a safer, more age-appropriate version of social media apps than the alternative.

That said, we recognize how important it is to get this right. We have heard your concerns, and that is why we announced that we are pausing the project to take more time. We'll keep listening to parents, keep talking with policymakers and regulators, keep taking guidance from experts and researchers, and we'll revisit this project at a later date. Critics of this project will inevitably see this as an acknowledgement that the project is a bad idea. That's not the case. The reality is that kids are already online, and we believe that developing age-appropriate experiences designed specifically for them is far better for parents than where we are today.

V. Conclusion

Facebook is committed to building better products for young people, and to doing everything we can to protect their privacy, safety, and well-being on our platforms. That is why we work to stop people under 13 from accessing platforms that are not built for them, develop features to protect young people on our platforms, build resources and tools for young people and parents, and conduct research and consult with external experts to help ensure that our users have a positive experience. Our goal, through all of these efforts, is to promote meaningful interactions, so that people can use our products to connect and share with the people they care about.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these important issues with you today. This is an area where we are investing heavily, and we welcome productive collaboration with lawmakers and elected officials.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.