

Testimony of Evan Spiegel
Co-Founder and CEO, Snap Inc.

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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear today to update you on our efforts to protect young people on Snapchat. I'm Evan Spiegel, the co-founder and CEO of Snap. Our service, Snapchat, is used by over 100 million Americans, including more than 20 million teenagers, to communicate with their friends and family. We have an enormous responsibility to keep our community safe.

We know that the scale and widespread use of Snapchat mean that bad actors will try to abuse our service and take advantage of our community. That's why we are constantly improving our safety tools and investing in protecting our community from the ever-evolving threat landscape. Protecting Snapchatters is our moral responsibility and a business imperative. I want to share more about some of the biggest threats we are working to combat, but first I want to provide a bit of background about our service as this is my first time appearing before the Committee.

When my co-founder Bobby Murphy and I first built Snapchat in 2011, we wanted something different. We grew up with social media and it made us feel miserable – a public, permanent, popularity contest filled with constant judgment. Social media was for perfect pictures, instead of the everyday moments that we believe strengthen real friendships.

We built Snapchat to offer a new way to communicate with friends and family, to share the moment, in the moment, and help people feel together even if they are physically far apart. On average, people spend most of their time on Snapchat talking with their friends. We designed Snapchat to open into the camera, instead of a content feed, to encourage creativity instead of passive consumption. When people share their Story with friends on Snapchat there are no public likes or comments.

By embracing ephemerality, and deleting messages by default, we gave Snapchat the lightness of a phone call or face-to-face conversation that isn't recorded or saved forever. This has helped millions of Americans feel more comfortable expressing themselves and sharing how they really feel with their friends and family. When people sign up for Snapchat, we make it clear that even though conversations are deleted by default, messages can be easily saved or screenshot by the recipient.

When we build new features, we make business trade-offs to better serve our community and help keep Snapchat safe. For example, when we built our content service, we decided to proactively moderate content before it can be broadly distributed to help prevent the spread of harmful content. We also pay media publishers and creators a share of our revenue to

incentivize them to produce content that is entertaining and consistent with our content guidelines.

We've designed our service to require communication between friends to be opt-in, meaning people have to proactively choose who they communicate with, unlike text messaging, where any stranger can message someone if they have their phone number. Friend lists are private on Snapchat, which not only reduces social pressure but also limits the ability of predators to find a person's friends on Snapchat.

We want Snapchat to be safe for everyone, and we offer extra protections for minors to help prevent unwanted contact and provide an age-appropriate experience. Snapchat's default "Contact Me" settings are set to friends and phone contacts only for all accounts, and can't be expanded. If a minor receives a friend request from someone they don't share a mutual friend with, we provide a warning before they start communicating to make sure it is someone they know. As a result, approximately 90% of friend requests received by minors on Snapchat are from someone with at least one mutual friend in common. Our goal is to make it as difficult as possible for people to be contacted by someone they don't already know.

We encourage Snapchatters to report unwanted contact or violating content, and we block the offending account. For people who do not have a Snapchat account but want to make a report, we also offer reporting tools on our website. All reports are confidential and our Trust and Safety team works 24 hours per day, seven days per week, around the world to review each report and consistently enforce our rules.

When we take action on illegal or potentially harmful content, we retain the evidence for an extended period, which allows us to support law enforcement in their investigations. We also proactively escalate to law enforcement any content that appears to involve imminent danger of death or serious physical injury and typically respond to emergency data disclosure requests within 30 minutes. We want criminals who abuse Snapchat to be brought to justice.

There are three major threats to our community that we are working to eliminate from our service: extortion, the distribution of child sexual abuse material, and illicit drugs.

The first is the concerning rise in financially-motivated sextortion, a form of blackmail where criminals pose as a potential love interest and convince victims to send compromising images. The bad actors then threaten to release the images and demand payment, often in the form of gift cards, which can be photographed and shared via chat. Many of these cases involve predators located outside of the United States which makes enforcement through the legal process more challenging.

In response to this growing crisis, we have developed new tools to proactively detect these bad actors on our service and seek to intervene before the conversation can escalate to extortion. When harassment or sexual content is reported to us by our community, our team acts quickly, usually taking action within 15 minutes.

Second, we are also identifying criminals who seek to re-victimize children who have been sexually abused by sharing images and videos of the abuse on our service. We scan image and video uploads to Snapchat for known child sexual abuse material and report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. In 2023 we made 690,000 reports that led to more than 1,000 arrests. We do not anticipate implementing encryption in a way that would prevent us from scanning uploads for known child sexual abuse imagery.

Third, is the ongoing and devastating fentanyl epidemic that claimed the lives of over 100,000 Americans last year. We are determined to remove drug dealers and drug-related content from our service. We proactively scan our service for illegal drug content, disable drug dealer accounts and ban their devices from accessing our service, preserve the evidence, and make referrals to law enforcement, including the Drug Enforcement Administration. In 2023, we removed more than 2.2 million pieces of drug-related content, disabled the 705,000 related accounts, and blocked the devices associated with those accounts from using Snapchat.

We block drug-related search terms and redirect people searching for drugs to educational materials on our service. Fentanyl poses a unique threat, because it is incredibly lethal and laces nearly every type of drug and counterfeit pill available on the street. That's why we believe education is so important and we have invested in public awareness campaigns, such as One Pill Can Kill, which was viewed over 260 million times on Snapchat, and the Ad Council's Real Deal on Fentanyl to educate our community on the dangers of counterfeit pills.

In addition to the parental controls available as part of the iOS and Android operating systems, we have worked to empower parents by giving them more tools to supervise the way their teens use Snapchat. Parents can use our Family Center to view a list of people that their teen is communicating with using our service. This resembles how we believe parents monitor their teens' activity in the real world – where parents want to know who their teens are spending time with but don't need to listen in on every private conversation. Family Center also allows parents to review privacy settings and set content controls.

I hope this hearing represents an opportunity to move forward important legislation like the Kids Online Safety Act and the Cooper Davis Act. We support this legislation, not only in word, but in deed, and we have worked to ensure our service lives up to the legislative requirements before they are formal, legal obligations. This includes limiting who can communicate with teens to friends and contacts only, offering in-app parental tools, proactively identifying and removing harmful content, and referring lethal drug content to law enforcement. We are continuing to work with the Committee on the Stop CSAM Act, which we believe represents meaningful progress towards eradicating child sexual exploitation from online services.

Many of the largest and most successful Internet companies today were born here in the United States of America, and we must lead not only in technical innovation but also in smart regulation. That is why we support a comprehensive federal privacy bill that will protect the data privacy of all Americans and create consistent privacy standards for all online services.

I want to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation for all of the incredible partners and collaborators we work with across the industry, in government, and the nonprofits

and NGOs who share our goal of keeping our community, and especially young people, safe. We are particularly grateful to law enforcement and the first responders who are vital to these efforts. For the sake of brevity and for fear of leaving someone out, I won't list everyone individually, but please accept our deepest thanks and utmost gratitude.

We consistently hear from our community that using Snapchat makes them feel happy and we know that relationships with friends and family are important for mental health and wellbeing. We recently commissioned research from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago that found respondents who use Snapchat report higher satisfaction with the quality of their friendships and relationships with family than non-Snapchatters. Our deep desire to make a positive impact in the world motivates us every day to make sure that our service is used in a safe and healthy way.

Fundamentally, we believe that online interaction should be safer than offline interaction. While we recognize that it may be virtually impossible to eliminate all of the risks involved with using online services, we are determined to do our part to protect the Snapchat community. Young people represent our country's future and we must work together to protect them.

Thank you.

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