



Office of the Mayor

13CONSENT CALENDAR

November 16, 2021

To: Honorable Members of the City Council

From: Mayor Jesse Arreguín (Author), Councilmember Sophie Hahn (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Susan Wengraf (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Ben Bartlett (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Condemning Facebook/Meta for its Role in the Rise of Hate Crimes

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution condemning Facebook and its parent company Meta for failing to address mitigating hate speech while censoring efforts to promote awareness around hate crimes.

BACKGROUND

Hate crimes across the country are on the rise, and Berkeley is not immune to this. According to the FBI's 2020 report on hate crimes, there has been a 13% increase in hate crimes compared to 2019, including a 76% increase in hate crimes against Asian Americans. While multiple factors can be attributed to this rise, it is clear that social media has played a role in this, by allowing misleading information and hate speech to proliferate. Algorithms designed to cater to a user's preferences can lead people down this dangerous path of misinformation.

Meta, which recently rebranded from Facebook, owns multiple platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. In October 2021, whistleblower and former Facebook employee Frances Haugen revealed thousands of documents showing the company failed to act on a series of issues it was aware of that is harmful to its users. This includes withholding important information about vaccine misinformation, knowing that Instagram is harmful to teenagers' mental health, and their inability to manage the removal of hate speech, especially in other languages and countries. Ms. Haugen has testified to national governments that Meta has made hate worse, and that the company has placed profit over the safety of its users.

In 2017 Berkeley was invaded by far-right groups that organized events on Facebook centered around speeches by racist provocateurs. In August 2017, just a couple of weeks after a deadly rally in Charlottesville, an event organized by individuals also involved in Charlottesville planned another event in Berkeley. This led to the creation of the United Against Hate campaign, which performs outreach and intervention in communities to promote understanding, healing, reconciliation and redemption centered around its annual "United Against Hate Week." Since its inception, United Against Hate week has grown from a local event to a national movement to restore respect and civil

discourse, embrace the strength of diversity and build inclusive and equitable communities for all.

United Against Hate has attempted to promote awareness through a campaign on Facebook, specifically highlighting the rise in hate crimes against the AAPI community (Attachment 2). Despite multiple attempts and appeals, Facebook has rejected the ad, stating that it violated their advertising policies on social issues (Attachment 3). The company's failure to allow the promotion of important information that seeks to raise awareness about hate speech and hate crimes while also failing to address the proliferation of misinformation, polarization, and hate speech, has directly contributed to the growing societal discord in the United States.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no environmental impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

CONTACT PERSON

Mayor Jesse Arreguín 510-981-7100

Attachments:

- 1: Resolution
- 2: Copy of proposed United Against Hate ad
- 3: Copy of Facebook's rejection of the ad

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

CONDEMNING META/FACEBOOK FOR FAILING TO ADDRESS MITIGATING HATE
SPEECH WHILE CENSORING EFFORTS TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AROUND
HATE CRIMES

WHEREAS, hate crimes have been increasing in recent years, with the 2020 FBI report on hate crimes showing 8,263 reported incidents in 2020, up from 7,314 in 2019, a trend that has been growing in recent years; and

WHEREAS, 2020 saw a 76% rise in hate crimes towards Asian Americans, fueled by misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic that is proliferated on social media; and

WHEREAS, Meta, formerly known as Facebook, is currently one of the largest tech companies in the United States, which owns multiple platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp; and

WHEREAS, Meta has come under fire in recent months after whistleblower Frances Haugen, who formerly worked as a product manager for Facebook's civic integrity team, revealed thousands of documents showing the company failed to act on a series of issues it was aware of that is harmful to its users; and

WHEREAS, examples include withholding important information about vaccine misinformation, knowing that Instagram is harmful to teenagers' mental health, and their inability to manage the removal of hate speech, especially in other languages and countries; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Haugen has testified to national governments that Meta has made hate worse, and that the company has placed profit over the safety of its users; and

WHEREAS, the company has been accused of making it easier for malicious people to incite violence through their platforms, with notable examples in the United States, United Kingdom, India, and Ethiopia, while also being accused of their algorithms creating fertile grounds for hate crimes to flourish; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, Berkeley was an epicenter of a series of events organized by far-right groups through Facebook, many of which promoted speeches by racist provocateurs; and

WHEREAS, in August 2017, just a couple of weeks after a deadly rally in Charlottesville, an event organized by individuals also involved in Charlottesville planned another event in Berkeley, leading to the creation of the United Against Hate campaign; and

WHEREAS, since its foundation, United Against Hate has grown from a local event to a national movement to restore respect and civil discourse, embrace the strength of diversity and build inclusive and equitable communities for all; and

WHEREAS, in 2021, United Against Hate has attempted to promote awareness through a campaign on Facebook, but the company rejected the ads and the non-profit's appeals, stating that it violated their advertising policies on social issues; and

WHEREAS, the company's failure to allow the promotion of important information that seeks to raise awareness about hate speech and hate crimes while also failing to address the proliferation of misinformation, polarization, and hate speech, has directly contributed to the growing societal discord in the United States.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that it hereby condemns Facebook and its parent company Meta for failing to act on issues surrounding hate speech that it was internally aware of, while also blocking the ability of United Against Hate from promoting information relating to the surge in hate crimes.



Stand United Against Hate



Posted 1d • 🌐

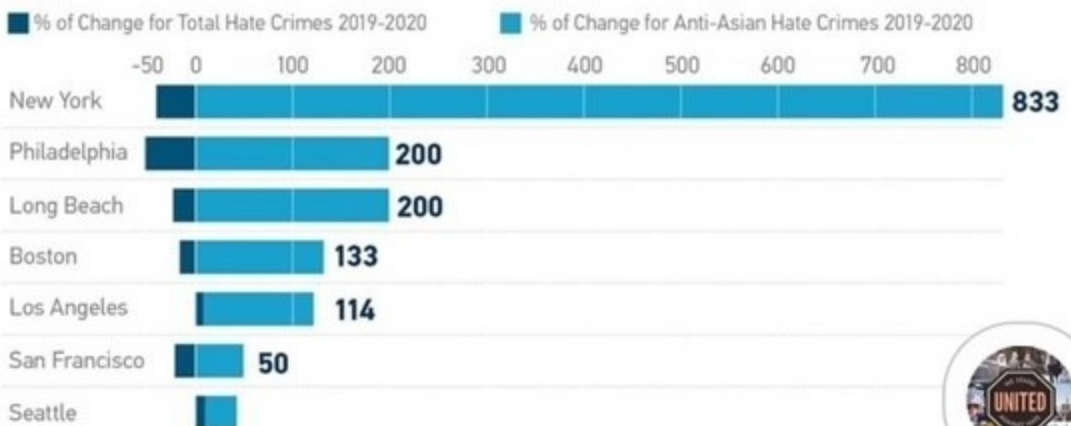
A week of hate crime awareness (pt. 2) 📣

The analysis released by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University last month examined hate crimes in 16 of America's largest cities. The report shows that while crimes triggered by racial hatred in 2020 decreased overall by 7 percent, those targeting Asian people rose by 149 percent.

#StopAAPIHate

Hate crimes reported to police in America's largest cities

Anti-Asian hate crimes surged 145%, while overall hate crimes dropped 6% in 2020.



Source: Center for the Hate & Extremism



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Account: Jacquelyn McCormick

Campaign: Post: "A week of hate crime..."

Ad Set: Post: "A week of hate crime..."

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