

KATHY CASTOR
14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
AND COMMERCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS
RANKING MEMBER

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INNOVATION, DATA
AND COMMERCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY, CLIMATE
AND GRID SECURITY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON
THE STRATEGIC COMPETITION
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST
PARTY



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0914

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

2052 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3376

TAMPA DISTRICT OFFICE:

4144 NORTH ARMENIA AVENUE
SUITE 300
TAMPA, FL 33607
(813) 871-2817

ST. PETERSBURG DISTRICT OFFICE:

136 FOURTH STREET NORTH
SUITE 201
ST. PETERSBURG, FL 33701
(727) 369-0201

castor.house.gov

May 21, 2024

Adam Mosseri
Chief Executive Officer, Instagram
1601 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94107

Dear Adam Mosseri,

It has been brought to my attention that Instagram is creating a new “Friend Map”¹ feature which would allow users to see their friends’ locations in real time. We write to express concern about the development and launch of the soon-to-be-released feature. It is paramount that social media platforms such as Instagram keep privacy, safety and the best interests of its young users at the center of all designs, and we do not believe that a “Friend Map” feature would meet those criteria.

Social media platforms, such as Meta’s Instagram, provide opportunities for connection, learning and creation online. It is a platform’s responsibility to facilitate an online environment that is safe, especially for its youngest users. Instagram’s proposed feature will require the tracking of young people and their devices’ locations. Geolocating minors is not an essential function to your platform. In fact, geolocation surveillance of minors is an unnecessary violation of privacy. Furthermore, the public sharing of that information puts young users at risk of further surveillance, violence and unsolicited interactions.

We know that often users accept or make friend requests for users that they do not know personally. User to user location sharing may occur, but that should not be the prerogative of platforms themselves. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Instagram has been used repeatedly to connect pedophiles to one another –The *Journal* called it a “vast network of accounts openly

¹ Malik, A. (2024, February 27). *Instagram is working on a “friend map” feature that would let you track friends’ locations*. TechCrunch. <https://techcrunch.com/2024/02/26/instagram-confirms-developing-snap-map-like-friend-map-feature/>

devoted to the commission and purchase of underage-sex content².” According to The New York Times, Instagram’s algorithms facilitate communication between minors and adults, specifically men who have been arrested for using social media to solicit children for sex.³ Knowing that your platform hosts a network of malign actors, a location-sharing feature for minor users is likely to exacerbate this abuse. In fact, Meta’s own documents reveal that the company knowingly exploits young people’s psychological behaviors, such as by impulsive behavior, susceptibility to peer pressure, and the underestimation of risks⁴, all of which are clear risk factors that will likely lead to additional poor decision-making with respect to Instagram’s proposed new feature.

Big tech companies, like Meta and Instagram, have some of the world’s most talented designers working to create experiences that keep young users online habitually. Platforms have manipulated data and design features to create addictive environments which leads to an increase in time spent online, the sale of more advertisements and products, and enormous profits for platforms at the expense of users⁵. To date, Meta has failed to institute platform changes that would correct these harms – including refusing to implement design features like Project Daisy, ignoring calls to disable filters that mimic plastic surgery and failing to respond adequately to users who report significant decreases in their self-worth. “Friend Map” will make these harms worse: evidence suggests that location-based apps where young people can view the real-time location of their friends can be detrimental to their mental health. In one study, 45% of teen girls surveyed reported that location sharing had a negative effect on them.⁶

In short, it is apparent that the advancement of a new Friend Map Instagram feature would violate young users’ privacy and put them at risk for unintended consequences. It is time that social media platforms, like Instagram, end their vast collection of data without users’ consent⁷ and exposure of minors to stalking, sextortion, and worse⁸.

For all of the above reasons, we ask that you respond to the questions below by May 31, 2024:

² Horwitz, J. (2023a, June 7). *WSJ News exclusive | Instagram connects vast pedophile network*. Wall Street Journal . <https://www.wsj.com/articles/instagram-vast-pedophile-network-4ab7189>

³ Keller, M. H., & Valentino-devries, J. (2024, May 13). On Instagram, a jewelry ad draws solicitations for sex with a 5-year-old. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/us/instagram-child-safety.html>

⁴ AP News. (2023b, November 27). *Court document claims meta knowingly designed its platforms to Hook Kids, reports say*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/instagram-facebook-underage-users-meta-04c8797da2c7ff2021931536d324faea>

⁵ Lapowsky, I. (2019, March 17). *How Cambridge Analytica sparked the Great Privacy Awakening*. Wired. <https://www.wired.com/story/cambridge-analytica-facebook-privacy-awakening/>

⁶ Movie & TV reviews for parents. (2023, March 30). *Teens and mental health: How girls really feel about social media*. Common Sense Media.

⁷ Singer, N. (2023, November 25). *At Meta, millions of underage users were an “open secret,” states say*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/25/technology/instagram-meta-children-privacy.html>

⁸ Horwitz, J. (2023b, December 1). *Meta is struggling to boot pedophiles off Facebook and Instagram - WSJ*. Meta Is Struggling to Boot Pedophiles Off Facebook and Instagram. <https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-facebook-instagram-pedophiles-enforcement-struggles-dceb3548>

1. Will Meta agree to abandon its proposed Friend's Map? If not, please explain why.
2. What research has Meta conducted on how location-based apps can affect young people's mental health? Please share the top findings.
3. What research has Meta conducted that verifies the Friend Map feature cannot be used to perpetuate stalking, sextortion and other physical harms?
4. Has Meta consulted with expert groups and young users to understand the potential pitfalls of the potential addition of this feature to Instagram?
5. What is Meta's timeline for rolling out the new Friend Map feature on Instagram?
6. Given the backlog of over 2.5 million accounts Meta allegedly has of users under the age of 13, how will Meta ensure that underage users' locations cannot be found by adults or bad actors⁹?

We sincerely hope that you abandon your proposed Friend Map feature and look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please contact Congresswoman Castor's Legislative Assistant, Capreece Kelsaw, at 202-225-3376 or Capreece.Kelsaw@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Lori Trahan
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

⁹ Horwitz, J. (2023b, November 25). *Meta designed products to capitalize on teen vulnerabilities, states allege* - WSJ. The Wall Street Journal . <https://www.wsj.com/business/media/meta-designed-products-to-capitalize-on-teen-vulnerabilities-states-allege-6791dad5>