



May 3, 2021

Representative Chris Turner
Chair
Texas House Democratic Caucus

Dear Representative Turner and Members of the House Democratic Caucus:

As a business group devoted to a progressive future, we write to urge your **strong and vocal opposition** to **SB 12**, Republican legislation that should be renamed the “**Promote Online Disinformation and Hate Speech Act.**”

Our organization, the Chamber of Progress (progresschamber.org), is a new center-left tech industry coalition promoting technology’s progressive future. We work to ensure that all Americans benefit from technological leaps, and that the tech industry operates responsibly and fairly. I am a longtime Democratic political aide, and our Advisory Board is composed of Democrats in government, civil society, and industry.

Our organization’s commitment to a progressive society, economy, and workforce sets us apart from other business groups. For example, we strongly oppose legislation to curtail voting rights; support President Biden’s proposed corporate tax increase to fund infrastructure investments; back a national emissions reduction target of 50% by 2030; and support a stronger social safety net.

We also strongly support **healthy online communities** -- free of hoaxes, conspiracy theories, hate speech, incitement to violence, and election- and vaccine-related disinformation. That’s why we strongly oppose SB 12, which **would tie online services’ hands in the fight against toxic, incendiary content.**

- **The bill would cause social media services to be overrun with disinformation and conspiracy theories.** The bill’s ban on “censoring a user’s expression...based on the viewpoint of the user or another person” would impose a false impartiality standard that would hobble platforms’ constitutional freedom to remove or downrank QAnon conspiracies, vaccine disinformation, or former President Trump’s election “Big Lie.” For example, this rule would effectively prohibit Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook from removing an obviously false claim that a local elected official drank children’s blood.
- **The bill would give Russian trolls more tools to interfere with our elections.** Multiple federal investigations have clearly established the Russian government’s sophisticated online disinformation campaign to interfere in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 U.S. elections. While the bill’s requirement that social platforms publicly disclose “specific information regarding how the social media platform...moderates content [and] uses search, ranking, or other algorithms” could aid transparency, it would also enable new waves of Russian government trolls to devise new strategies to evade platforms’ evolving rules.

- **The bill would empower the Attorney General to bring politically-motivated lawsuits against platforms for removing or downranking incendiary speech.** The bill would turn the state Attorney General into the political speech police, by giving him the right to bring legal action and impose financial penalties on social platforms. This would allow current and future Attorneys General unchecked power to pressure social networks to allow or disallow certain types of speech, under consequence of legal action.

Technology services have helped advance progressive goals -- democratizing access to goods and information, giving voice to the marginalized, and supporting millions of high-quality jobs. Wikipedia let anyone with an internet connection become an armchair expert on the topic of their choice. Amazon and eBay brought e-commerce to the masses. And social media facilitated conversations between friends and strangers across vast distances.

But no one wants the Internet to become a cesspool of hate and lies, and that's why online services must retain the freedom to moderate healthy online communities -- **including taking action against incendiary or hateful content**. In severely limiting services' ability to to remove or downrank the most egregious speech online today, this bill would only **incentivize people to spread hate and lies online**.

The Republican majority is advancing this measure despite its obvious violation of the Constitution and First Amendment. For the sake of history it's vital to speak up against the harmful intent and impact of this bill.

We urge you to stand in **strong and vocal opposition** to SB 12.

Sincerely,



Adam Kovacevich
CEO and Founder
Chamber of Progress