

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 3, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Mark Zuckerberg
Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer
Meta
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

I write to you today regarding yet another example of Meta's censorship, this time against Olympic and Paralympic shooting champions and other shooting sport enthusiasts. In a blatant instance of bias against the Second Amendment and freedom of expression, Meta has reportedly shadow-banned and de-platformed several members of USA Shooting who represent our nation on the world stage. This bias is unacceptable and must be promptly resolved.

According to reports, Meta has censored leading athletes in shooting sports, including Olympian Vincent Hancock and Paralympian McKenna Geer. Mr. Hancock, a U.S. Army veteran, recently won his fourth Olympic gold medal in skeet shooting, having previously proved himself the world's best marksman in 2008, 2012, and 2021. A dominant figure in the sport, Mr. Hancock is the first skeet shooter to earn an Olympic gold medal more than once, and he joined an elite group, becoming only the sixth Olympian to win a gold medal in the same event four times. He has become a role model for others in the same way that swimmers look to Michael Phelps. Yet, instead of allowing his athletic feats to be celebrated, moderators at Meta have chosen to punish Mr. Hancock by restricting his accounts.¹

In July of this year, Ms. McKenna Geer faced similar censorship from Meta. Ms. Geer was born with a muscular disorder that can impact an individual's ability to do even the simplest tasks. Incredibly, Ms. Geer has risen to the highest echelons of shooting sports and was chosen to represent the United States in the air-rifle event at the Paralympic Games. When she posted a photo holding the very rifle she used to qualify for the Games, Meta flagged the photo as a violation of its guidelines and informed her that she would be effectively shadow-banned, with nonfollowers being unable to view her account or her content, all because her post failed to promote a "safe environment." When she tried to appeal the decision, the appeal platform wasn't functional.²

Meta's discrimination is not limited to these two athletes. Instead, this pattern of censorship has affected other shooting athletes and even the West Point Rifle Team's page, which Facebook argued violated their Community Standards.³ This censorship seems specifically targeted at

¹ Larry Keane, *Olympic Shotgunner Wins Gold Again. So Meta Shut Him Down*, NSSF (August 6, 2024), <https://www.nssf.org/articles/olympic-shotgunner-wins-gold-again-so-meta-shut-him-down>.

² Tim Rupli, *Meta Censors a Paralympic Shooter*, WALL ST. J. (July 24, 2024), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/meta-censors-a-paralympic-athlete-air-rifle-f7321d29>.

³ *Id.*

shooting sports, as no other sport faces the same online discrimination. Any reasonable individual could draw only one conclusion: this attack on freedom of speech and sport is simply due to the use of a firearm. Never mind the fact that many of these athletes use their platforms to advocate for firearm safety and responsible gun ownership, or that shooting is one of the few sports that can unite athletes across the boundaries of age and ability. This is simply an effort by Meta to virtue signal to the world and trample on these athletes' freedom of expression.

De-platforming Olympic and Paralympic athletes—not to mention one of our nation's elite military academies—can only be called one thing: un-American. Indeed, it is an assault on everything we hold dear as a nation: freedom of expression, the right to bear arms, and the celebration of those who bring glory home to America through sport and sacrifice. With that in mind, we request a response to the following inquiries by September 17, 2024:

1. What are Meta's policies regarding content moderation on your platforms related to the discussion of shooting sports and the lawful use and ownership of firearms? Please provide references to the specific policies that can be found in your terms of service or elsewhere.
2. How many accounts has Meta suspended or restricted due to their discussion of shooting sports and the lawful use and ownership of firearms?
3. Please provide all internal documents relevant to the decision to de-platform Mr. Hancock, Ms. Geer, the West Point Rifle Team, and other shooting athletes who represent America.
4. Please explain what steps users must take to appeal a decision by Meta to suspend or remove an account.
 - a. In what circumstances, if any, is an option to appeal unavailable to users?
 - b. Why was Ms. Geer initially unable to appeal Meta's decision?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator