

Durbin Questions Facebook Whistleblower During Senate Judiciary Subcommittee Hearing On Social Media Harms To Kids

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, today questioned Facebook whistleblower Arturo Béjar, former Director of Engineering for Facebook’s Protect and Care team, at a Senate Judiciary

Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law hearing entitled “Social Media and the Teen Mental Health Crisis.”

“The bottom line is this. They made a decision that it is not a priority to them because of a profit motive, have they not? In terms of what it will cost them in their business model if they have to interrupt it and monitor the content.”

Mr. Béjar responded by saying, “that would be a wonderful question to ask Mark and Sheryl , who is no longer there, and Adam , because they can speak to why they made these choices. I can only speak to the fact that they kept making those choices over and over again.”

Durbin responded, **“I would just back up what Senator Graham said. If this becomes expensive to them, to continue this outrageous conduct, then they may pay closer attention, that’s for sure.”**

Durbin then asked Mr. Béjar about his recommendation that social media companies use perception-based surveys to adequately protect kids on its platforms. For example, Meta’s most-recent Community Standards Enforcement Report suggests that the company acted on 97 percent of content relating to child endangerment and nearly 66 percent of bullying and harassment content before it was reported by users. But data Mr. Béjar collected demonstrates how these reports can be misleading. For example, he has cited data from perception-based surveys to show that there is a big difference between users’ actual experience of harassment and unacceptable content on Instagram and what Meta is policing and reporting.

“You have suggested here, as well, that we need a survey of young people as to their experience. Do you want to explain that?” Durbin asked.

Mr. Béjar responded, “The way that harm should be tracked on these products is you go up to teens and ask them, ‘did you receive an unwanted sexual advance in the last seven days,’ and they are going to know. It doesn’t matter what the message is. What you can do to help that teen is to give them a chance to tell you. The measures that I talk about aren’t even expensive to implement.”

Durbin continued, **“We were also briefed by the DEA in terms of narcotics transactions and the use of platforms for that purpose. Did you ever look into that issue?”**

Mr. Béjar responded that he did not look into that issue directly, but that he did provide numbers to the Committee and there is a category for that class of issues. “You should ask the company how much of that content teens, which teens experience as that, they take down,” Mr. Béjar said.

Mr. Béjar concluded by saying, “these companies should be held accountable for the content they recommend.”

“I certainly agree with that. Thank you for your testimony,” said Durbin.

Video of Durbin’s questions in Committee is available [here](#).

Audio of Durbin’s questions in Committee is available [here](#).

Footage of Durbin’s questions in Committee is available [here](#) for TV Stations.

Since the Senate Judiciary Committee’s [hearing](#) on this issue in February, five bills have advanced out of the Senate Judiciary Committee on a bipartisan basis to help stop the exploitation of kids online, including:

- Durbin’s [STOP CSAM Act](#), which supports victims and increases accountability and transparency for online platforms.
- The [EARN IT Act](#), which removes tech’s blanket immunity from civil and criminal liability under child sexual abuse material laws and establishes a National Commission on Online Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention;
- The [SHIELD Act](#), which ensures that federal prosecutors have appropriate and effective tools to address the nonconsensual distribution of sexual imagery;
- The [Project Safe Childhood Act](#), which modernizes the investigation and prosecution of online child exploitation crimes; and
- The [REPORT Act](#), which combats the rise in online child sexual exploitation by instilling new measures to help strengthen reporting of those crimes to the CyberTipline.

The Committee has also advanced the [Cooper Davis Act](#) on a bipartisan basis. The bill, as amended in Committee, would require social media companies to take on a more active role in reporting the illegal sale and distribution of drugs on their platforms.