The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights

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An Open Letter to Tech Companies

To the executives and board members of United States tech companies,

We have seen how the current administration is pressuring tech companies to limit efforts to fight the spread of mis- and disinformation, to forgo critical AI safeguards in favor of moving quickly, and to ignore the potential negative impacts your products, tools and services may have on the civil rights of your users. On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 240 organizations dedicated to protecting the rights of all people in the United States, and our Center for Civil Rights and Technology we implore you: do not capitulate to this pressure, and stay true to the values that your customers and users count on.

People are looking to you for leadership. We call on you to take this opportunity to be on the right side of history and to do what is best for not only your users, but also for the business interests that drive innovation and result in products and services that we all can trust.

Our recommendations:

As leaders shaping the future of technology, you are facing a defining moment: the rise of AI is an opportunity for the industry to flex its muscle and build new, innovative products that work for everyone. Proactively promoting principles around equity, fairness, and efficiency will help guarantee success:

1. **Prioritize user experience: Engage in content moderation.** Content moderation allows you to improve user experiences and retain advertisers. If your technology enables violence, threats, harassment, defamation, doxxing, and toxicity, your users can and will seek out alternatives to your product, and advertiser spending will follow. Likewise, if your technology empowers disinformation, deepfakes, voter suppression, and other anti-democratic and unpatriotic efforts, your users will cease to trust you and your product.

   In order to be trustworthy, content moderation needs to be transparent: moderated content should always be coupled with a specific rationale. It needs to be responsive to reality, which requires an understanding of context beyond the current capabilities of AI. In order to be trustworthy, it must be done with human oversight. These humans should be employees, not contractors, and should be granted all of the respect and protections awarded to any other employee. Outsourcing content moderation to your users through crowdsourced models like Community Notes is not enough. As private companies, you have a legal right and a responsibility to your users to decide what is published on your platforms

2. **Prioritize user safety: Implement AI with care.** Developing and deploying AI should be done thoughtfully, safely, transparently, and equitably. Adhering to these principles means monitoring AI for bias, making AI tools accessible to researchers, disclosing training data, and other reasonable efforts to minimize the black box effect. Our recently published Innovation Framework: A Civil Rights Approach to AI offers a step-by-step guide for implementing these values throughout the AI development and deployment lifecycle.

   There are already countless instances of AI causing harm: biased AI systems in essential sectors – like banking, healthcare, housing, education, and justice – have resulted in people being denied mortgages, being pushed out of housing, being passed over for educational opportunities, and being wrongfully arrested. You have the power to say "no more."

3. **Prioritize user civil rights: Show us with actions, not words.**
   It may feel expedient to cooperate with the current administration to avoid retribution, but our communities have long memories, and we will remember what you do right now. Your employees will remember. Consumers will remember. Making the right decisions today will build lasting trust with your users.

   Show us you're with us with your actions, not only your words. One clear action you can take is this: Do not give this administration, or any future administration, technology or consumer data that can be weaponized against our communities. Nowhere is this clearer than with immigration enforcement, where the administration is relying on surveillance technology and consolidation of our most personal data to target and disappear our family members, friends, and neighbors. This is only possible with the proactive collaboration of companies like yours.

   We also urge you to be true partners in supporting comprehensive data privacy measures that protect consumers from unwarranted intrusion and harms from companies and government alike. These actions are not only the right things to do; they are the best long-term business decisions.

Civil rights are not a constraint; they are a catalyst for sustainable growth, innovation, and widespread beneficial impact. As leaders of major tech companies, you have the power – and the opportunity – to make products that change the world for the better.

Our rationale:

The Trump administration's push to centralize authority under the banner of "efficiency" raises serious questions about its long term intentions. With significant influence now exerted over regulatory bodies, including previously independent agencies, Congress, and the judiciary, it is not surprising that it has now

turned its attention to the private sector – particularly the tech industry, which holds immense sway over public discourse, innovation, and our daily activities.

The administration's attempts to exert authority over the tech industry is a significant development, especially since it is leveraging federal agencies like the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission to attempt to shape industry behavior in ways that harm people.

However, regulatory pressure appears to be only part of the strategy. Another dynamic is emerging, one in which companies are encouraged to seek approval or favor from the administration to avoid potential consequences and obtain federal contracts. This creates a climate of uncertainty, where alignment with political interests is becoming a prerequisite for stability. Some companies have capitulated to this pressure – not necessarily out of agreement, but out of caution. This dynamic has not been lost on the public.

It is vital that companies recognize this pattern and consider its implications in both the short and long terms. Your choices today about how your products adhere to civil rights will affect not only your users' trust in technology, but the long-term viability of your businesses and the technology industry as a whole. You must consider the consequences, not just for your business and your autonomy, but for the broader health of the societal norms that allow your business to thrive.

For these reasons, civil rights must be a strategic priority:

- **Trust is the foundation of user engagement.** Technology is facing heightened scrutiny as users want more transparency, fairness, and respect. The Leadership Conference's Civil Rights Monitor and a recent Pew survey found that people are increasingly worried about AI. Safeguards around privacy, speech, and equity show users that your company is taking their concerns seriously, which builds loyalty, reduces churn, and strengthens brand reputation across diverse US communities.

- **Innovation depends on inclusion.** Practices like minimizing risks, making equitable platforms, considering AI's impact on marginalized communities, building representative workforces, and ensuring the technology works for all do not hinder innovation; they unlock it. Inclusion and diversity foster creative and safe environments, help to identify and mitigate harmful risks, and simply put, enable companies to build better products.

- **Proactive leadership drives business success.** Building products that respect the rights of individuals, families, and society is not only the right thing – it is the smart thing. By embedding

safeguards now, your companies will stay ahead of governments around the world that are shifting compliance standards to protect their citizens. You will avoid costly litigation and position yourselves and the United States as global leaders who set standards for others to follow. By making careful decisions on who you do business with now – and who you prioritize in divisive times – you will show your users where you stand and foster long-term success.

Let us ensure that your technologies and the way we use them reflect the values we all stand for. A better world is possible, and it is your responsibility to help humanity get there. We would welcome further discussion: please email Alejandra Montoya-Boyer, VP of the Center for Civil Rights and Technology, at montoyaboyer@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

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President & CEO
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights