

Advocating Against Romance Scammers
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Senator
Russell Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator,

We, at Advocating Against Romance Scammers, are writing on behalf of every identity theft and online romance scammed victim. As you well know, on October 28th 2020, the Commerce Committee will be conducting a hearing with big tech CEO's on the subject of Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act. We would like to address the committee members by taking a look at CDA230 from an advocate's perspective. As you will learn, the law is not just about freedom of speech, but the dark side of what the CDA230 allows the platforms to "get away with".

Today's world revolves around the internet and social platforms. There's no denying that this is a new way of life, but I think we can all agree, safer platforms is a goal.

FACEBOOK RELATIONSHIP

As Co-Founders of the nonprofit, Advocating Against Romance Scammers (AARS), we have conducted a plethora of research on our venture to find why platforms are unsafe for account holders. The reports written specifically for Facebook can be found on our website, advocatingforu.com. AARS has had several in-person and video conferences with a Facebook/Instagram team, which has resulted in little to no change within their cyber-security system. No change equals no sense of protection for their customers. We are not talking a year's work with Facebook/Instagram, but a "relationship" with them since July 2017. Over this time span, we have watched a dating, gaming and market site be built upon the Facebook platform. When does the safety and security of the account holders come first?

THE NUMBERS

In 2019, the Internet Crimes Complaint Center (IC3) showed 19,473 reported Confidence Fraud/Romance scams resulting in **\$475,014,031** exiting the United States alone. This is an epidemic, a global epidemic. Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act has allowed the social media platforms to hide behind the laws general wording. Gave them an inch, they took a mile. How can any company be accepting of the crimes occurring upon their platform? Having the awareness over years with very little to show of additional safety, is like a slap in the face to all identity theft victims and scammed survivors.

CRIMES ONLINE

During our in-person Facebook meetings and through multiple emails with the team, we have provided an overabundance of information on particular “gangs” that conduct their scamming business upon their platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp). The accounts the scammers create upon the platforms to conduct their business, exhibit the following sales: scammed victim’s information, script/stories to aid in scamming the innocent, photos of military, “how to’s” of scamming, gift cards, fake government forms, government ID’s, etc. Please review for yourself. Proceed to Facebook and search ‘Groups’ or ‘Pages’ for accounts with the names “Yahoo Boys”, “Gee Guys”. You will find many accounts that are open to the public, and when you do, please ask yourself how this is remotely acceptable and still “covered” by a law. At this time, the platforms are not responsible in any way for allowing these criminal acts upon their site. Under Section 230, platforms can hide from involvement and scream freedom of speech.

VICTIMS

We have spoken with countless victims over the years, heard of many stories ending in suicide because the victims have given every dime, plus their friends and families “dimes” to the scammers. Their life, as they “knew” it, just became a lie, with all of this being done via the platforms. Yes, victims have a responsibility for awareness and safety, but how does one know about anything unless they are made aware (which platforms neglectfully do not do). We have included personal stories from romance scammed victims residing in the United States. We do ask that you protect their identity by keeping their name anonymous.

SECTION 230 OF THE CDA

We, amongst countless others, ask for Section 230 of the CDA be amended. A revisit and change are a necessity for today’s cyber culture. Section 230 does protect freedom of speech, but it also enables the criminals to conduct crimes upon the platforms, not to mention allowing the sites to be accessories to crimes without punishment. They (the platforms) should undoubtedly be held responsible, as they would in the “real” world. Section 230 is over 20 years old. In the tech world, 20 years is considered several life times. For the law to “keep up” with the cyber culture, it is crucial this law be revisited and amended, as needed, within a 24-month period.

AARS BACKGROUND

AARS was co- founded by an online Identity Theft victim, Col. Bryan Denny (Ret.), along with a friend of a romance scammed victim, Kathy Waters. Both have met with several congressional departments over the years, on the need to amend Section 230 of the CDA. Currently Representative Adam Kinzinger has proposed two bills for platform safety H.R. 6586 and H.R. 6587, both of which AARS had a solid hand in. You can find our advocacy work at advocatingforu.com. There is also a petition we have built (<https://www.change.org/advocatingforu>), that currently holds over 11,000 signatures in support of increased platform safety/responsibility.

We thank you for your time and are happy to provide any additional information, or answer to questions you may have. Please know, this is just the very tip of the iceberg. Please see our partners with Alliance to Counter Crime Online (<https://www.countercrime.org>) for more facts on online crimes the CDA230 permits.

Warm regards,

Kathy Waters

Co-Founder/Executive Director of Advocating Against Romance Scammers