

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 17, 2022

Mr. Sundar Pichai  
Chief Executive Officer  
Alphabet Inc.  
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway  
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai,

We write today regarding disturbing new reports that Google has been directing users who search for abortion services towards anti-abortion ‘fake clinics,’ also known as ‘crisis pregnancy centers’ or ‘pregnancy resource centers’ without any disclaimer indicating these businesses do not provide abortions and seek to steer women away from certain health decisions.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of the leaked Supreme Court decision that would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, we find these reports especially concerning and would appreciate your immediate attention to this matter.<sup>2</sup>

According to research by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), a U.S.-based nonprofit that fights online hate and misinformation, 11% of results for searches for “abortion clinic near me” and “abortion pill” in states with so-called ‘Trigger Laws’ – laws that would effectively ban abortion if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned – were for anti-abortion fake clinics. Directing women towards fake clinics that traffic in misinformation and don’t provide comprehensive health services is dangerous to women’s health and undermines the integrity of Google’s search results.<sup>3,4</sup>

This problem is even more pronounced on Google Maps, where CCDH found that 37% of search results were for anti-abortion fake clinics. Google should not be displaying anti-abortion fake clinics or crisis pregnancy centers in search results for users that are searching for an ‘abortion clinic’ or ‘abortion pill.’ If Google must continue showing these misleading results in search results and Google Maps, the results should, at the very least, be appropriately labeled.

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<sup>1</sup> “Google search results for abortion services are leading users to ‘fake clinics’, new study finds,” *Center for Countering Digital Hate* (June 9, 2022) available at <https://counterhate.com/blog/anti-abortion-fake-clinics/>

<sup>2</sup> Josh Gerstein and Alex Ward, “Supreme Court has voted to overturn abortion rights, draft opinion shows,” *Politico* (May 2, 2022) available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/02/supreme-court-abortion-draft-opinion-00029473>

<sup>3</sup> Bryant AG, Narasimhan S, Bryant-Comstock K, and Levi EE, “Crisis pregnancy center websites: Information, misinformation and disinformation,” *PubMed - National Institutes of Health* (July 12, 2014) available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25091391/>

<sup>4</sup> Amy G. Bryant, MD, MSCR and Jonas J. Swartz, MD, MPH, “Why Crisis Pregnancy Centers Are Legal but Unethical,” *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics* (March 2018) available at <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/why-crisis-pregnancy-centers-are-legal-unethical/2018-03>

CCDH also found that 28% of Google Ads displayed at the top of search results were for anti-abortion fake clinics. Since facing criticism over misleading ads related to anti-abortion fake clinics in 2019, Google has provided a disclaimer – albeit one that appears in small font and is easily missed – for ads from anti-abortion fake clinics.<sup>5</sup> However, no such warning is present on non-sponsored search results on Google Search.<sup>6</sup> The prevalence of these misleading ads marks what appears to be a concerning reversal from Google’s pledge in 2014 to take down ads from crisis pregnancy centers that engage in overt deception of women seeking out abortion information online.<sup>7</sup>

Given this disturbing research, we would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. What steps will Google take to limit the appearance of anti-abortion fake clinics or so-called ‘crisis pregnancy centers’ in Google search results, Google Ads, and on Google Maps when users search for “abortion clinic,” “abortion pill,” or similar terms?
2. If Google will not take action to prevent anti-abortion fake clinics from appearing in search results, will Google add user-friendly disclaimers that clearly indicate whether or not a search result does or does not provide abortions?
3. What additional steps will Google take to ensure that users are receiving accurate information when they search for health care services like abortion on Google Search and Google Maps when users search for “abortion clinic,” “abortion pill,” or similar terms?

We urge you to take action to rectify these issues and help ensure women seeking health care services are directed to the basic information they request. Many thanks for your consideration, and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> Tiffany Hsu, “Google Changes Abortion Ad Policy,” *The New York Times* (May 21, 2019) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/business/media/google-abortion-ads.html>

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Schraer, “Anti-abortion groups target women with misleading ads,” *the BBC* (May 17, 2022) available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61320202>

<sup>7</sup> Amanda Marcotte, “Google Agrees to Remove Deceptive Crisis Pregnancy Center Ads,” *Slate* (April 29, 2014) available at <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/04/google-will-stop-running-crisis-pregnancy-center-ads.html>



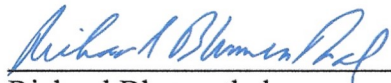
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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



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Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



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Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress



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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



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Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



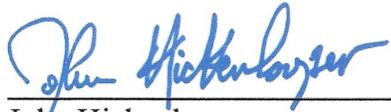
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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

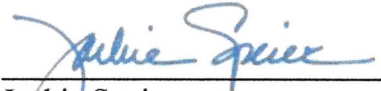


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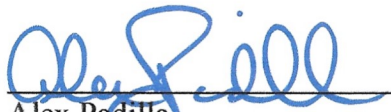
Katie Porter  
Member of Congress



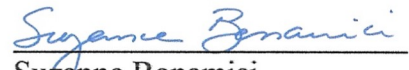
John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress



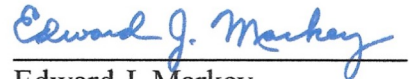
Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator