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Attorney General Raúl Torrez Files Unredacted Complaint Against Snapchat, Exposing Internal Messages that Snap Knowingly Contributed to Harm Amongst Children

Santa Fe, NM – Today, Attorney General Raúl Torrez filed the unredacted complaint against Snap Inc. (Snapchat). The lawsuit was originally filed on September 4th, but its contents, including numerous Snap internal documents, were heavily redacted. Today's filing exposes Snap's internal messages that the New Mexico Department of Justice asserts show a history of ignoring reports of sextortion, failing to implement verifiable age-verification, admitting to features that connect minors with adults and other serious infringements on the user experience.

"Today's filing is further confirmation that Snapchat's harmful design features create an environment that fosters sextortion, sexual abuse and unwanted contact from adults to minors," **said Attorney General Torrez**. "It is disheartening to see that Snap employees have raised many red flags that have continued to be ignored by executives. What is even more disturbing is that unredacted information shows that the addicting features on Snapchat were blatantly acknowledged and encouraged to remain active on the platform. I will always work to hold companies, like Snap and Meta, accountable to create a safer user experience."

Unredacted complaint highlights include:

- A Snap executive emailed in 2022 that "I don't think we can say that we actually verify" users' age. "[T]he app, like many other platforms, doesn't use an age-verification system, so any child who knows how to type a fake birthday can create an account . . ." This was contrary to Snap's public statements that it does not permit use by children under the age of 13.
- By November 2022, according to the unsealed complaint, "Snap employees were discussing 10,000 user reports of sextortion each month, while acknowledging that these reports 'likely represent a small fraction of this abuse ...'" Despite this knowledge, Snap did not fully warn of the risks of its platform, not wanting to "strick[e] fear" among its users. The Complaint alleges that Snap is a primary platform used by criminals to carry out sextortion.
- Snap employees noted that "user reports related to grooming and sextortion" were falling "through the cracks" and that "no action is taken by agents" in response to user reports "being sextorted or asked for nudes (which we know is often the start of sextortion)." Employees pointed to an account with 75 different reports against it "mentioning nudes, minors, and extortion, yet the account was still active." Instead, Snap noted that moderating this content would "create disproportionate admin costs."
- In 2022, an outside consultant allegedly advised Snap that "experiencing inappropriate contact and unsolicited communications seems to be a relatively common problem on Snapchat . . ." Snap's own research that year is reported to show that one-third of teen girls and 30% of teen boys were exposed to unwanted contact on its platform. One year later, 51% of Gen Z respondents to Snap surveys indicated that they or a friend experienced catfishing; of those, half said it happened to them in the last 3 months, 44% had actually shared images or information, and one-quarter were sextorted. This far exceeded the incidence on other platforms.

- In 2022, Snap employees also allegedly recognized internally that Snapchat was suggesting adult strangers to minors through its Quick Add feature, that Snap Map also allowed adults to find minors, and discussed the need for stronger warnings. Snap also referenced a “Sextortion handbook” that showed how to use Snap Maps to target users at nearby schools. Snap also discussed in 2019 that searching “underage” on Snapchat would allow users to find the accounts of minors.

The Complaint notes that the Quick Add feature has had dangerous results in New Mexico. In 2023, Alejandro Marquez plead guilty and was sentenced to 18 years in prison after the Albuquerque Police Department confirmed he raped an 11-year-old girl he met through Snapchat’s “Quick Add” feature and messaged her on the platform.

- Also unredacted is the allegation that former Snap trust and safety employees complained that they were largely ignored by upper management and “that there was pushback in trying to add in-app safety mechanisms because [Snap CEO] Evan Spiegel prioritized design.” In another internal email, Spiegel rejected the suggestion that Snap preserved images it categorized as abuse for its review or to share with law enforcement, but left that up to its users, writing “we don’t want to be responsible for storing that stuff. Better if they screenshot and email ghostbusters [Snap’s user report mechanism] to report.”

Elsewhere, the complaint quotes a Slack chat in which Snap employees discussed that “by design, over 90% of account-level reports are ignored today.” Likewise, an internal investigation of confirmed sextortion cases involving 279 victims “concluded that 70% of victims didn’t report their victimization (and of the 30% that did report, there was no enforcement action by our team . . .”

- Snap allegedly did not keep its database of child sex abuse images current. When this failure was identified and the database updated, employees were directed to roll back the change and delete the evidence of matches.
- The unredacted allegations also reference Snap’s slow response to the sale of drugs or CSAM on Snap and internal complaints that “were [sic] over-run by this sextortion s... right now. We’ve twiddled our thumbs and wrung our hands all f...ing year.”

According to the newly filed Complaint, the NMDNJ also found evidence that Snap tolerated drug and gun sales on the platform. The Complaint reveals internal documents showing that Snapchat’s ‘Discovery’ feed recommended drug dealers who posted Snapchat Stories to market illegal drugs, amassing “a huge amount of subscribers.”

- Snap’s analysis and an outside security firm report also are quoted to state that “at least ~700k Snapchatters are exposed to drug content daily in the areas we scanned” and that it “takes under a minute to use Snapchat to be in a position to purchase illegal and harmful substances.” Law enforcement apparently warned Snap that its ephemeral messages caused drug dealers to prefer Snapchat and made their activity “untraceable.”

In other unredacted allegations, the Complaint includes excerpts from an employee’s internal presentation acknowledging that Snap has a “problem” with drugs and guns. The presenter’s notes indicate that dealers are using Snapchat’s sharing mechanisms “to reach teens on Snapchat they would never encounter in real life” and that “some teens have even died as result of buying drugs that they found through Snapchat.”

Finally, among the unredacted materials are allegations that Snap knew that ‘Snapstreaks,’ which rewards users for uninterrupted use, elicited encouraged uncontrolled use, eliciting a comment from one of its employees “Wow, we should have more addicting features like this.” Indeed, the Complaint references a Snap survey that shows that 45% of Gen Z Snapchat users the platform “almost constantly.”

Despite these real harms, Snap has made it hard for parents to guide or monitor their children's use of Snapchat. "Only about 0.33% of teens have joined the Family Center," which employees described as "extremely hard to find."

While Attorney General Torrez continues to work to hold social media companies accountable, the NMDOJ has developed and compiled resources for teens and parents to protect themselves and their families from the threats posed by social media platforms. Resources can be found [here](#).

See attached to read the unredacted complaint.

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