



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
ATTORNEYS GENERAL

PRESIDENT

Ellen F. Rosenblum
Oregon
Attorney General

March 5, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

PRESIDENT-ELECT

John Formella
New Hampshire
Attorney General

Jennifer Newstead
Chief Legal Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

VICE PRESIDENT

William Tong
Connecticut
Attorney General

Re: Meta Account Takeovers and Lockouts

IMMEDIATE PAST
PRESIDENT

Dave Yost
Ohio
Attorney General

Dear Ms. Newstead:

We, the undersigned attorneys general (the “State AGs”), write to request immediate action to address the dramatic increase in user account takeovers and lockouts on Facebook and Instagram. Our offices have experienced a dramatic and persistent spike in complaints in recent years concerning account takeovers that is not only alarming for our constituents but also a substantial drain on our office resources.

In an account takeover, threat actors compromise Facebook and Instagram user accounts and change passwords so that the rightful owner cannot access the account. Once threat actors gain access, they can usurp personal information, read private messages, scam contacts, post publicly, and take other nefarious actions.

Consumers are reporting their utter panic when they first realize they have been effectively locked out of their accounts. Users spend years building their personal and professional lives on your platforms, posting intimate thoughts, and sharing personal details, locations, and photos of family and friends. To have it taken away from them through no fault of their own can be traumatizing. Connections that they made and friendships that they forged become threatened.

Even more alarming, there is a significant risk of financial harm to both the affected user and other individuals on the platform. Many use Facebook as a hub for their businesses or to engage in consumer transactions through Facebook Marketplace; some users even have credit cards tied to their accounts. We have received a number of complaints of

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Brian Kane
Executive Director

threat actors fraudulently charging thousands of dollars to stored credit cards. Furthermore, we have received reports of threat actors buying advertisements to run on Meta. In some cases, the ads violate your terms leading to user accounts getting banned. Finally, there are reports of threat actors posing as trusted friends and offering products for sale, or posing as a friend in need, seeking money from their “friends.”

Below are some examples of complaints showing a user’s frustration at their situation as they were locked out of their accounts and Meta’s failure to provide help:

“I received a message on LinkedIn from someone that it seemed like my Facebook account had been hacked. I tried to log-in and recover my password however I noticed they changed the email on my account and my phone number is no longer associated with my account. I have attempted to contact Facebook but there is no customer support and the methods online are all dead-ends as my account has also been disabled due to whatever nonsense the hacker was posting.”

“My personal Facebook Account and business pages were hacked in April 2023. The hacker ran inappropriate ads and got the account suspended. \$500 was charged to my business bank account. The account was closed and the funds were returned. However, communication with my customers online has been completely disrupted. I have used the Facebook online support system which requests my ID and a completed form. No one has contacted me after filling this out.”

“On April 10, 2022, my Facebook account for 15 years was permanently disabled. I made several attempts over the past 2 years to contact Facebook to get my account reinstated by sending in letters making phone calls and filing numerous appeal forms with zero responses from the company. There are precious, irreplaceable memories I would like access too with the reinstatement of my account.”

“My Facebook account and my email account were hacked and taken over. The person changed the email on my Facebook account and deleted my phone number. They have since, changed the profile picture and have been posting under my name. I have reported this to Facebook in every way possible and many of my friends have reported it as a fake account. Nothing has been done by Facebook and they claim it doesn't go against their community standards. Facebook needs to get this account back under my control or take it down. It's basically a case of identity theft and Facebook is doing nothing about it.”

“My Facebook account has been hacked. I can't get any help from Meta. There is no one to talk to and meanwhile all my personal pictures are being used. My contacts are receiving false information from the hacker. The hacker has changed the phone and email on my account so I can't recover

my account. A few of my friends have notified me of misinformation being spread on my account by the individual is using my name and likeness.”

“My Instagram business account was blocked.... This is my business account, which is important to me and my life. I have invested my life, time, money and soul in this account. All attempts to contact and get a response from the Meta company, including Instagram and Facebook, were crowned with complete failure, since the company categorically does not respond to letters. There is also no answer to the forms provided in their help center.”

The Problem Keeps Getting Worse

Account takeovers are not a new phenomenon. This issue affects all social media platforms and other online accounts as well. However, the frequency and persistence of account takeovers on Meta-owned platforms puts it in a league of its own.

For example, in 2019, the New York Attorney General’s office received a total of 73 account takeover complaints on Meta platforms. That number rose more than tenfold to 783 complaints by the end of 2023. In January 2024 alone, the office received 128 complaints.

Other states are experiencing similar trends:

- Vermont: 740% increase from 2022 to 2023
- North Carolina: 330% increase from 2022 to 2023
- Illinois: 256% increase from 2022 to 2023
- Pennsylvania: 270% increase from 2022 to 2023

Such statistics are extremely troubling. The substantial increase in complaints tells us that threat actors are winning the war and running rampant on Meta. While we may not be completely certain of any connection, we note that the increase in complaints occurred around the same time Meta announced a massive layoff of around 11,000 employees in November 2022, which reportedly focused on the “security and privacy and integrity sector.”¹

Meta Needs to Take Immediate Action

With this letter, we request Meta take immediate action and substantially increase its investment in account takeover mitigation tactics, as well as responding to users whose accounts were taken over. This is crucial not just to protect your users, but to reduce the unnecessary resource burden being placed on our offices to handle these large numbers of user complaints. We refuse to operate as the customer service representatives of your company. Proper investment in response and mitigation is mandatory.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/09/tech/meta-facebook-layoffs/index.html>

We would also like to discuss these issues and concerns with you at your earliest convenience. Additionally, we would like materials related to: the number of account takeovers over the past five years; suspected causes of the increase in account takeovers; safeguards currently in place to prevent account takeovers; current policies and procedures related to Meta's response to account takeovers; and staffing related to safeguarding the platforms against account takeovers as well as responding to complaints.

Sincerely,



Ashley Moody
Florida Attorney General



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Illinois Attorney General



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New York Attorney General



Jonathan Skrmetti
Tennessee Attorney General



Steve Marshall
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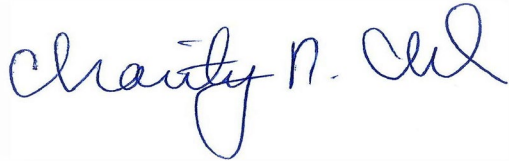
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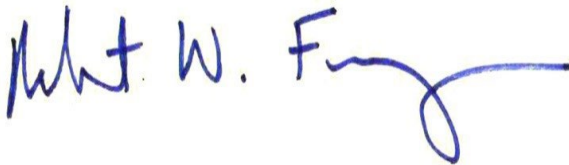
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