

United States Senate

February 4, 2019

Mark Zuckerberg
CEO, Facebook, Inc.

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

Last Friday, I was made aware that Facebook was removing listings of Alaska Native handicrafts under your policy against sales of “any part, pelt or skin from an animal including fur.”¹ However, the posted items were not the unworked animal products listed in your policies, but substantially altered, *legal* Alaska Native handicrafts created under the authorities of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.² Over the weekend, your staff, in contact with me and my staff, indicated that these actions were mistakes and that your policies do not ban these types of items. I am deeply concerned that when powerful platforms like Facebook take mistaken positions like this one, it could have devastating, long-term impacts for thousands of my Alaska Native (i.e., indigenous Alaskans) constituents and their millennia-old cultural and artistic traditions. If these actions were indeed mistakes, I ask that you confirm the scope of your prohibited items policy to clarify for my constituents and buyers across the country and the world that Alaska Native handicrafts made from marine mammals and other animals are not prohibited.

The Alaska Native community has for thousands of years used animal products for survival, subsistence, and as a key means of cultural expression. Today, thanks to greater access to the Lower 48 states and other countries through web platforms like Facebook, Alaska Natives living in remote villages and throughout Alaska can share their experiences and connect to people across our country and the world. In many of these communities, people still rely on a subsistence-based economy—hunting, fishing, and gathering most of their food and necessities. In many of these communities, few economic or job opportunities exist, and selling traditional art and cultural handicrafts derived from sustainably-harvested animals are often some of the most important economic activities to generate cash and economic opportunities. Moreover, enabling these opportunities helps empower Alaska Native communities to preserve their culture and heritage. Inhibiting the sale of these items not only limits the cultural exchange Facebook has empowered the Alaska Native Community to share, but also threatens one of the key economic opportunities in remote Alaska villages.

Going forward, I hope we can work together to positively use the power of Facebook to the benefit of Alaska Native people and their communities. An important part of my work in the

¹ Facebook, Inc., *Commerce Policy: Prohibited Content* <https://www.facebook.com/policies/commerce> (last visited Feb. 4, 2019).

² 16 USC § 1371(b).

Senate is to try to correct the problems caused when public officials and entities like online vendors do not fully understand the unique circumstances of my constituents. Platforms like Facebook can easily create mistaken impressions of what is and isn't legal, respectful and acceptable culturally, and cause long-lasting damage to certain cultures and economic opportunities. To ensure that Facebook continues in its stated mission, we would welcome the opportunity to work with Facebook to promote the fact that under federal law, Alaska Natives clearly have the right to participate in subsistence hunting for food, as well as use parts from these hunts in a non-wasteful manner to make handicrafts and beautiful art for sale.³ Further, a platform like Facebook has the power to expand economic opportunity to small communities, and these kinds of art and cultural expression are an important economic driver in small communities. You have been to Alaska and have seen the beautiful environment, remote communities, and cultural traditions that make Alaska a unique place. I urge you to ensure your policies clearly reflect this character and help to share Alaska's cultures with the rest of the world.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you, or to facilitate meetings between you and your staff and my constituents, to consider this issue in further detail.

Sincerely,


Dan Sullivan

Thanks for your attention
to this important
matter.

³ 16 USC § 1371(b).