CITY OF PALO ALTO OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

September 28, 2020

The Honorable City Council
Palo Alto, California

Designation of Voting Delegate for the League of California Cities Annual 2020 Conference, to be Held Virtually October 7-9, 2020; and Possible Direction to Delegate on League Resolution

The City Council should designate Vice Mayor DuBois as the voting delegate for the 2020 League of California Cities Annual Conference.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that Council direct the City Council-appointed voting delegate to abstain on the resolution up for consideration at the annual LOCC conference taking place virtually from October 7-9, 2020 as provided below.

Background

Each year at its annual conference, the League of California Cities (LOCC) accepts resolutions from member cities and elected officials for approval by the membership. The voting delegates determine whether to pass any resolutions during the general assembly, scheduled for October 9, 2020. This year, one resolution was introduced.

In order to vote at the general assembly, the City Council must delegate a voting delegate and could appoint up to two alternate voting delegates. At this time Council Member DuBois has registered for the conference.

Attached for your review is the 2020 LOCC Annual Conference Resolution Packet. (Attachment B). The packet contains the original language of the resolutions in their current forms along with LOCC staff analysis and letters of support.

Discussion

The single resolution introduced this year is summarized below:

A RESOLUTION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES CALLING FOR AN AMENDMENT OF SECTION 230 OF THE COMMUNICATIONS DECENCY ACT OF 1996 TO REQUIRE SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES TO REMOVE MATERIALS WHICH PROMOTE CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

Source: City of Cerritos

The City of Cerritos brings this resolution after recently spending thousands of dollars to respond to threats of looting at its local mall, threats made on Instagram. Criminal

threats on social media is not a new phenomenon; last year the Palo Alto Police Department responded to threats of a school shooting made on Instagram. And in June 2020, San Mateo County responded to threats of looting in Redwood City made via social media. Luckily, no violence occurred after either threat.

While many will use social media platforms for positive or neutral purposes, they can also be used by those wishing to cause harm or dissent. This resolution would urge Congress to remove the current liability immunity found in section 230 of the Communications Decency Act for social media providers who publish third-party content. The resolution would also require social media companies to; (1) implement programs to identify and remove content soliciting criminal activity, and (2) provide information to assist law enforcement in apprehending those who used social media to solicit criminal behavior.

Current related action: In June 2020, President Trump issued an Executive Order mandating regulators review section 230 to determine if it should be removed.

Discussion: The LOCC analysis notes that there are certain constitutional considerations involved in the potential action of requiring the removal of social media content and providing information to law enforcement. For example, the government mandating companies moderate content raises First Amendment free speech issues. Mandating companies release information regarding potential criminal activity without a warrant raises Fourth Amendment probable cause issues. Additionally, the release of information also leads to potential privacy concerns, especially if any of the information is subject to a public record request once received by local government.

The LOCC analysis further notes that, were the federal law amended as suggested, social media companies would "essentially police every conversation" on their platforms, using their own subjective interpretation of what to censor. Indeed, a May 20, 2020 NPR article regarding removing the legal immunity for social media companies notes that experts say "the most likely outcome" is "more censorship by major tech companies."

Financially, the LOCC analysis notes only theoretical fiscal impacts, as it's impossible to predict (1) if Congress would act based on LOCC adoption of the resolution, (2) what actions companies might take as a result, and (3) how such actions might impact cities. Certainly, if the section 230 immunity provisions were removed, social media companies might decide to prevent the posting of any content that could appear criminal. This could mean fewer, or no, threats requiring local law enforcement response, thus avoiding costs associated with police staff time.

It could also mean posters intent on criminal activity share information through coded words, thus avoiding the social media censors while still perpetuating the criminal activity. In this case, law enforcement intervention may still occur, generating costs to

cities. As it's not possible to accurately determine all the potential courses of action and reaction to this resolution, city staff cannot provide fiscal impact information.

Lastly, a thorough consideration of the potential implications involved with removing section 230 requires grappling with questions regarding constitutional protections, local government liability, privacy protection, and more. A few of those questions, from the LOCC staff analysis and from City staff, are noted below. These are included here not necessarily for Council to ponder, but rather, to demonstrate the complexity of the issues raised by this resolution:

1. If Congress acts as requested in the resolution, what are the impacts related to free speech, probable cause, and government censorship?
2. What are the expectations of cities when they receive information from a social media company about a potential threat in their community? What about threats to neighboring communities?
3. Does a city become liable for receiving such information and acting or not acting if the threat becomes real?
4. Are there liability considerations involved with cities retaining private, and possibly criminal, social media information, and is the information subject to a public record request once accepted by a local government?
5. Would amending the law as described directly benefit residents and businesses of Palo Alto? Do we take into consideration any impact on our residents who work for technology companies that may drastically change their business models as a result of amending the law? What of the technology businesses in our city?

The City certainly has an interest in protecting the safety of its residents, as expressed in one of the Foundational Principles found in Council's adopted Legislative Guidelines. However, it's unclear if amending section 230 of the Communications Decency Act as requested in the resolution would enhance safety, or if criminal actors would find a way around any new laws.

It's also unclear if the potential civil liberties issues raised might be more harmful than the removal or lessoning of criminal threats, some of which will never translate to action. As such, staff recommends the City adopt an abstain position, allowing the current review by federal regulators to continue without asking Congress to also take legislative action.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A: LOCC Voter Designation (PDF)
- Attachment B: 2020-Resolution-Packet-(1) (PDF)

Department Head: Beth Minor, City Clerk

LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES

Council Action Advised by August 31, 2020

CITY OF PALO ALTO, CA
CITY CLERK'S OFFICE
20 JUL -7 PM 2:30

June 30, 2020

TO: Mayors, City Managers and City Clerks

RE: DESIGNATION OF VOTING DELEGATES AND ALTERNATES
League of California Cities Annual Conference & Expo – October 7 – 9, 2020

The League's 2020 Annual Conference & Expo is scheduled for October 7 – 9. An important part of the Annual Conference is the Annual Business Meeting (during General Assembly) on Friday, October 9. At this meeting, the League membership considers and takes action on resolutions that establish League policy.

In order to vote at the Annual Business Meeting, your city council must designate a voting delegate. Your city may also appoint up to two alternate voting delegates, one of whom may vote in the event that the designated voting delegate is unable to serve in that capacity.

Please complete the attached Voting Delegate form and return it to the League's office no later than Wednesday, September 30. This will allow us time to establish voting delegate/alternate records prior to the conference.

Please note the following procedures are intended to ensure the integrity of the voting process at the Annual Business Meeting. These procedures assume that the conference will be held in-person at the Long Beach Convention Center as planned. Should COVID-19 conditions and restrictions prohibit the League from holding an in-person conference, new procedures will be provided.

- **Action by Council Required.** Consistent with League bylaws, a city's voting delegate and up to two alternates must be designated by the city council. When completing the attached Voting Delegate form, please attach either a copy of the council resolution that reflects the council action taken, or have your city clerk or mayor sign the form affirming that the names provided are those selected by the city council. Please note that designating the voting delegate and alternates **must** be done by city council action and cannot be accomplished by individual action of the mayor or city manager alone.

- **Conference Registration Required.** The voting delegate and alternates must be registered to attend the conference. They need not register for the entire conference; they may register for Friday only. Conference registration will open by the end of July at www.cacities.org. In order to cast a vote, at least one voter must be present at the Business Meeting and in possession of the voting delegate card. Voting delegates and alternates need to pick up their conference badges before signing in and picking up the voting delegate card at the Voting Delegate Desk. This will enable them to receive the

special sticker on their name badges that will admit them into the voting area during the Business Meeting.

- **Transferring Voting Card to Non-Designated Individuals Not Allowed.** The voting delegate card may be transferred freely between the voting delegate and alternates, but *only* between the voting delegate and alternates. If the voting delegate and alternates find themselves unable to attend the Business Meeting, they may *not* transfer the voting card to another city official.

- **Seating Protocol during General Assembly.** At the Business Meeting, individuals with the voting card will sit in a separate area. Admission to this area will be limited to those individuals with a special sticker on their name badge identifying them as a voting delegate or alternate. If the voting delegate and alternates wish to sit together, they must sign in at the Voting Delegate Desk and obtain the special sticker on their badges.

The Voting Delegate Desk, located in the conference registration area of the Long Beach Convention Center, will be open at the following times: Wednesday, October 7, 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.; Thursday, October 8, 7:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.; and Friday, October 9, 7:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m.. The Voting Delegate Desk will also be open at the Business Meeting on Friday, but will be closed during roll calls and voting.

The voting procedures that will be used at the conference are attached to this memo. Please share these procedures and this memo with your council and especially with the individuals that your council designates as your city's voting delegate and alternates.

Once again, thank you for completing the voting delegate and alternate form and returning it to the League's office by Wednesday, September 30. If you have questions, please call Darla Yacub at (916) 658-8254.

Attachments:
- Annual Conference Voting Procedures
- Voting Delegate/Alternate Form

LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES

Annual Conference Voting Procedures

1. **One City One Vote.** Each member city has a right to cast one vote on matters pertaining to League policy.

2. **Designating a City Voting Representative.** Prior to the Annual Conference, each city council may designate a voting delegate and up to two alternates; these individuals are identified on the Voting Delegate Form provided to the League Credentials Committee.

3. **Registering with the Credentials Committee.** The voting delegate, or alternates, may pick up the city's voting card at the Voting Delegate Desk in the conference registration area. Voting delegates and alternates must sign in at the Voting Delegate Desk. Here they will receive a special sticker on their name badge and thus be admitted to the voting area at the Business Meeting.

4. **Signing Initiated Resolution Petitions**. Only those individuals who are voting delegates (or alternates), and who have picked up their city's voting card by providing a signature to the Credentials Committee at the Voting Delegate Desk, may sign petitions to initiate a resolution.

5. **Voting.** To cast the city's vote, a city official must have in his or her possession the city's voting card and be registered with the Credentials Committee. The voting card may be transferred freely between the voting delegate and alternates, but may not be transferred to another city official who is neither a voting delegate or alternate.

6. **Voting Area at Business Meeting.** At the Business Meeting, individuals with a voting card will sit in a designated area. Admission will be limited to those individuals with a special sticker on their name badge identifying them as a voting delegate or alternate.

7. **Resolving Disputes**. In case of dispute, the Credentials Committee will determine the validity of signatures on petitioned resolutions and the right of a city official to vote at the Business Meeting.

LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES

CITY: _____

2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
VOTING DELEGATE/ALTERNATE FORM

Please complete this form and return it to the League office by Wednesday, September 30, 2020. Forms not sent by this deadline may be submitted to the Voting Delegate Desk located in the Annual Conference Registration Area. Your city council may designate one voting delegate and up to two alternates.

In order to vote at the Annual Business Meeting (General Assembly), voting delegates and alternates must be designated by your city council. Please attach the council resolution as proof of designation. As an alternative, the Mayor or City Clerk may sign this form, affirming that the designation reflects the action taken by the council.

Please note: Voting delegates and alternates will be seated in a separate area at the Annual Business Meeting. Admission to this designated area will be limited to individuals (voting delegates and alternates) who are identified with a special sticker on their conference badge. This sticker can be obtained only at the Voting Delegate Desk.

1. VOTING DELEGATE

Name: _____

Title: _____

2. VOTING DELEGATE - ALTERNATE

Name: _____

Title: _____

3. VOTING DELEGATE - ALTERNATE

Name: _____

Title: _____

PLEASE ATTACH COUNCIL RESOLUTION DESIGNATING VOTING DELEGATE AND ALTERNATES.

OR

ATTEST: I affirm that the information provided reflects action by the city council to designate the voting delegate and alternate(s).

Name: _____ Email _____

Mayor or City Clerk _____ Date _____ Phone _____
(circle one) (signature)

Please complete and return by Wednesday, September 30, 2020

League of California Cities
ATTN: Darla Yacub
1400 K Street, 4th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

FAX: (916) 658-8240
E-mail: dyacub@cacities.org
(916) 658-8254

Annual Conference Resolutions Packet

2020 Annual Conference Resolutions

October 7 – 9, 2020

INFORMATION AND PROCEDURES

RESOLUTIONS CONTAINED IN THIS PACKET: The League bylaws provide that resolutions shall be referred by the president to an appropriate policy committee for review and recommendation. Resolutions with committee recommendations shall then be considered by the General Resolutions Committee at the Annual Conference.

This year, one resolution has been introduced for consideration at the Annual Conference and referred to League policy committees.

POLICY COMMITTEES: Two policy committees will meet virtually at the Annual Conference to consider and take action on the resolution referred to them. The committees are: Governance, Transparency & Labor Relations and Public Safety. These committees will meet virtually on Tuesday, September 29, with the Governance, Transparency and Labor Relations Policy Committee meeting from 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and the Public Safety Policy Committee meeting from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. The sponsor of the resolution has been notified of the time and location of the meeting.

GENERAL RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE: This committee will meet virtually at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 8, to consider the reports of the policy committees regarding the resolutions. This committee includes one representative from each of the League's regional divisions, functional departments and standing policy committees, as well as other individuals appointed by the League president.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY: This meeting will be held virtually at 11:00 a.m. on Friday, October 9.

PETITIONED RESOLUTIONS: For those issues that develop after the normal 60-day deadline, a resolution may be introduced at the Annual Conference with a petition signed by designated voting delegates of 10 percent of all member cities (48 valid signatures required) and presented to the Voting Delegates Desk at least 24 hours prior to the time set for convening the Annual Business Meeting of the General Assembly. This year, that deadline is 12:30 p.m., Thursday, October 8.

Any questions concerning the resolutions procedures may be directed to Meg Desmond at the League office: mdesmond@cacities.org or (916) 658-8224

GUIDELINES FOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

Policy development is a vital and ongoing process within the League. The principal means for deciding policy on the important issues facing cities is through the League's seven standing policy committees and the board of directors. The process allows for timely consideration of issues in a changing environment and assures city officials the opportunity to both initiate and influence policy decisions.

Annual conference resolutions constitute an additional way to develop League policy. Resolutions should adhere to the following criteria.

Guidelines for Annual Conference Resolutions

1. Only issues that have a direct bearing on municipal affairs should be considered or adopted at the Annual Conference.

2. The issue is not of a purely local or regional concern.

3. The recommended policy should not simply restate existing League policy.

4. The resolution should be directed at achieving one of the following objectives:

   (a) Focus public or media attention on an issue of major importance to cities.

   (b) Establish a new direction for League policy by establishing general principals around which more detailed policies may be developed by policy committees and the board of directors.

   (c) Consider important issues not adequately addressed by the policy committees and board of directors.

   (d) Amend the League bylaws (requires 2/3 vote at General Assembly).

KEY TO ACTIONS TAKEN ON RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions have been grouped by policy committees to which they have been assigned.

Number	Key Word Index	Reviewing Body Action		
		1	2	3

1 - Policy Committee Recommendation to General Resolutions Committee
2 - General Resolutions Committee
3 - General Assembly

GOVERNANCE, TRANSPARENCY & LABOR RELATIONS POLICY COMMITTEE

		1	2	3
1	Amendment to Section 230 of The Communications Decency Act of 1996			

PUBLIC SAFETY POLICY COMMMITTEE

		1	2	3
1	Amendment to Section 230 of The Communications Decency Act of 1996			

KEY TO ACTIONS TAKEN ON RESOLUTIONS *(Continued)*

Resolutions have been grouped by policy committees to which they have been assigned.

KEY TO REVIEWING BODIES

1. Policy Committee
2. General Resolutions Committee
3. General Assembly

ACTION FOOTNOTES

* Subject matter covered in another resolution

** Existing League policy

*** Local authority presently exists

KEY TO ACTIONS TAKEN

A	Approve
D	Disapprove
N	No Action
R	Refer to appropriate policy committee for study
a	Amend+
Aa	Approve as amended+
Aaa	Approve with additional amendment(s)+
Ra	Refer as amended to appropriate policy committee for study+
Raa	Additional amendments and refer+
Da	Amend (for clarity or brevity) and Disapprove+
Na	Amend (for clarity or brevity) and take No Action+
W	Withdrawn by Sponsor

Procedural Note:
The League of California Cities resolution process at the Annual Conference is guided by the League Bylaws. A helpful explanation of this process can be found on the League's website by clicking on this link: Resolution Process.

1. A RESOLUTION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES CALLING FOR AN AMENDMENT OF SECTION 230 OF THE COMMUNICATIONS DECENCY ACT OF 1996 TO REQUIRE SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES TO REMOVE MATERIALS WHICH PROMOTE CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

Source: City of Cerritos
Concurrence of five or more cities/city officials
Cities: City of Hawaiian Gardens, City of Lakewood, City of Ontario, City of Rancho Cucamonga, City of Roseville
Referred to: Governance, Transparency and Labor Relations and Public Safety Policy Committees

WHEREAS, local law enforcement agencies seek to protect their communities' residents, businesses, and property owners from crime; and

WHEREAS, increasingly, criminals use social media platforms to post notices of places, dates and times for their followers to meet to commit crimes; and

WHEREAS, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 currently provides online platforms (including social media platforms) immunity from civil liability based on third-party content and for the removal of content; and

WHEREAS, in the 25 years since Section 230's enactment, online platforms no longer function simply as forums for the posting of third-party content but rather use sophisticated algorithms to promote content and to connect users; and

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Justice, in its June 2020 report, "Section 230 — Nurturing Innovation or Fostering Unaccountability?," concluded the expansive interpretation courts have given Section 230 has left online platforms immune from a wide array of illicit activity on their services, with little transparency or accountability, noting it "makes little sense" to immunize from civil liability an online platform that purposefully facilitates or solicits third-party content or activity that violates federal criminal law; and

WHEREAS, current court precedent interpreting Section 230 also precludes state and local jurisdictions from enforcing criminal laws against such online platforms that, while not actually performing unlawful activities, facilitate them; and

WHEREAS, amendment of Section 230 is necessary to clarify that online platforms are not immune from civil liability for promoting criminal activities; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED at the League General Assembly, assembled at the League Annual Conference on October 9, 2020 in Long Beach, California, that the League calls upon the U.S. Congress to amend Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 to condition immunity from civil liability on the following:

1. Online platforms must establish and implement a reasonable program to identify and take down content which solicits criminal activity; and

2. Online platforms must provide to law enforcement information which will assist in the identification and apprehension of persons who use the services of the platform to solicit and to engage in criminal activity; and

3. An online platform that willfully or negligently fails in either of these duties is not immune from enforcement of state and local laws which impose criminal or civil liability for such failure.

Background Information to Resolution

Source: City of Cerritos

Background:

Social media platforms are now used as a primary means of communication, including by criminals who use them to advertise locations, dates, and times where the criminal acts will take place. Such communications, because they occur online, render the online platform immune from any civil liability for the costs incurred by law enforcement agencies that respond under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996. Immunity from civil liability extends even to injunctive relief, thus preventing local governments from merely seeking an injunction against the online platform to have such a post removed.

The City of Cerritos supports the rights of free speech and assembly guaranteed under the First Amendment, but believes cities should have the ability to hold social media companies liable for their role in promoting criminal acts. Recently, the City suffered thousands of dollars in damages to respond to online threats that the Cerritos Mall would be looted. Anonymous posts on Instagram.com invited followers to "work together to loot Cerritos [M]all" only several days after the Lakewood Mall had been looted, causing thousands of dollars in damages. The posts were made under the names "cerritosmalllooting" and "cantstopusall," among others. The City of Cerritos had no choice but to initiate response to protect the Mall and the public from this credible threat.

At the same time local governments face historic shortfalls owing to the economic effects of COVID-19, the nation's social media platforms are seeing a record rise in profits. The broad immunity provided by Section 230 is completely untenable. Online platforms should be held responsible—and liable—for the direct harm they facilitate. Local governments are in no position to bear the costs of the crimes facilitated by these companies alone.

Congress is currently reviewing antitrust legislation and by extension, Section 230's immunity provisions. The League urges Congress to amend Section 230 to limit the immunity provided to online platforms when they promote criminal activity to provide local governments some measurable form of relief.

League of California Cities Staff Analysis on Resolution No. 1

Staff: Charles Harvey, Legislative Representative
Bijan Mehryar, Legislative Representative
Caroline Cirrincione, Policy Analyst
Johnnie Piña, Policy Analyst

Committees: Governance, Transparency and Labor Relations
Public Safety

Summary:
This resolution states that the League of California Cities should urge Congress to amend Section 230 of the federal Communications Decency Act of 1996 (CDA) to limit the immunity provided to online platforms where their forums enable criminal activity to be promoted.

Ultimately, the policy objectives proposed under this resolution, if enacted, would incentivize social media companies to establish and implement a reasonable program to identify and remove content that solicits criminal activity.

Background:
The City of Cerritos is sponsoring this resolution in reaction to events whereby persons, using social media platforms to coordinate locations, dates, and times for their planned criminal activity, have committed acts of looting and vandalism resulting in both actual economic harm for targeted businesses, and pecuniary loss to cities who used resources to prevent such acts from occurring when such plans are discovered.

For example, just days after the Lakewood Mall had been looted, the City of Cerritos uncovered online communications via social media that persons were planning to target the nearby Cerritos Mall. Consequently, the city felt compelled to undertake measures to protect the Cerritos Mall, costing the city thousands of dollars to guard against what officials believed to be a credible threat.

Staff Comments:
Overview:
While there is certainly an argument to substantiate concerns around censorship, the use of social media as a tool for organizing violence is equally disturbing.

Throughout much of the 2020 Summer, there have been many reports of looting happening across the country during what were otherwise mostly peaceful demonstrations. Combined with the speculation of who is really behind the looting and why, the mayhem has usurped the message of peaceful protestors, causing a great deal of property damage in the process. Likewise, these criminal actions have upended the livelihood of some small business owners, many of whom were already reeling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While social media allows people to connect in real time with others all over the world, organized illegal activity using social media is made easier by the anonymous nature of virtual interactions.

Nation's Reaction to the Murder of George Floyd:
Shortly after the senseless killing of George Floyd by law enforcement on May 26, 2020, civil unrest began as local protests in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul metropolitan area of Minnesota before quickly spreading nationwide to more than 2,000 cities and towns across the United States, and in approximately 60 countries in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Protests unfolded across the country throughout the entire month of June and into July, and persisted in a handful of cities such as Portland and Seattle into the month of August.

Although the majority of protests were peaceful, some demonstrations in cities escalated into riots, looting, and street skirmishes with police. While much of the nation's focus has been on addressing police misconduct, police brutality, and systemic racism, some have used demonstrators' peaceful protests on these topics as opportunities to loot and/or vandalize businesses, almost exclusively under the guise of the "Black Lives Matter" movement. It has been uncovered that these "flash robs"[1] were coordinated through the use of social media. The spontaneity and speed of the attacks enabled by social media make it challenging for the police to stop these criminal events as they are occurring, let alone prevent them from commencing altogether.

As these events started occurring across the country, investigators quickly began combing through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram seeking to identify potentially violent extremists, looters, and vandals and finding ways to charge them after — and in some cases before — they sow chaos. While this technique has alarmed civil liberties advocates, who argue the strategy could negatively impact online speech, law enforcement officials claim it aligns with investigation strategies employed in the past.

Section 230 and other Constitutional Concerns
At its core, Section 230(c)(1) of the CDA provides immunity from liability for providers and users of an "interactive computer service" who publish information provided by third-party users. Essentially, this protects websites from lawsuits if a user posts something illegal, although there are exceptions for copyright violations, sex work-related material, and violations of federal criminal law.

Protections from Section 230 have come under more recent scrutiny on issues related to hate speech and ideological biases in relation to the influence technology companies can hold on political discussions.

Setting aside Section 230, there are some potential constitutional issues one could raise, should there be an attempt to implement such a resolution into statute.

[1] The "flash robs" phenomenon—where social media is used to organize groups of teens and young adults to quickly ransack and loot various retail stores—began to occur sporadically throughout the United States over the past ten years.

In the United States, the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting most forms of speech, which would include many proposals to force tech companies to moderate content. While "illegal" types of speech enjoy limited or no First Amendment protection, the line for delineating between "legal" and "illegal" speech is very difficult to determine. Consequently, one would expect online platforms to push back on whether there is a constitutionally feasible way for them to "identify" protected speech versus unprotected speech, or whether there is a feasible way to define "content which solicits criminal activity." A law requiring companies to moderate content based on the political viewpoint it expresses, for example, would likely be struck down as unconstitutional.

Nonetheless, private companies can create rules to restrict speech if they so choose. Online platforms sometimes argue they have constitutionally-protected First Amendment rights in their "editorial activity," and therefore, it violates their constitutional rights to require them to monitor (i.e., "identify and take down") content that may be protected under the First Amendment. They may also argue, along the same lines, that the government may not condition the granting of a privilege (i.e., immunity) on doing things that amount to a violation of their first amendment rights. This is why Facebook and Twitter ban hate speech and other verifiably false information, for example, even though such speech is permitted under the First Amendment.

With respect to privacy and the Fourth Amendment, online platforms may argue that requiring them to "provide to law enforcement information that will assist in the identification and apprehension of persons who use the services of the platform to solicit and to engage in criminal activity," turns them into government actors that search users' accounts without a warrant based on probable cause, in violation of the Fourth Amendment.

Industry Perspective

Unsurprisingly, industry stakeholders have strong opinions for what such changes could mean for their respective business models.

For instance, a Facebook spokesperson recently noted in a Fortune article that, "By exposing companies to potential liability for everything that billions of people around the world say, this would penalize companies that choose to allow controversial speech and encourage platforms to censor anything that might offend anyone."

The article acknowledges that in recent years, both political parties have put social media companies under increased scrutiny, but they are not unified in their stated concerns. While Republicans accuse the companies of unfairly censoring their post, Democrats complain that these companies fail to do enough to block misinformation, violent content, and hate speech.

The article concludes that there is no way companies like Facebook and Twitter could operate without Section 230, and that the removal of this section would thereby "eliminate social media as we know it."

Recent Federal Action on Social Media

The President recently issued an *Executive Order on Preventing Online Censorship*. In it, he notes the following:

> "The growth of online platforms in recent years raises important questions about applying the ideals of the First Amendment to modern communications technology. Today, many Americans follow the news, stay in touch with friends and family, and share their views on current events through social media and other online platforms. As a result, these platforms function in many ways as a 21st century equivalent of the public square.
>
> Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube wield immense, if not unprecedented, power to shape the interpretation of public events; to censor, delete, or disappear information; and to control what people see or do not see."

Ultimately the President implores the U.S. Attorney General to develop a proposal for federal legislation that "would be useful to promote the policy objectives of this order." The President is not subtle in communicating his desire to ultimately see legislation heavily slanted toward the preservation of free speech on social media, which some interpret as a maneuver to preempt Twitter and Facebook from regulating speech they otherwise deem as hateful or demonstrably false.

Considerations for Congress

Courts have generally construed Section 230 to grant internet service providers broad immunity for hosting others' content. Many have claimed that Section 230's immunity provisions were critical to the development of the modern internet, and some continue to defend Section 230's broad scope. But simultaneously, a variety of commentators and legislators have questioned whether those immunity provisions should now be narrowed, given that the internet looks much different today than it did in 1996 when Section 230 was first enacted.

One way for Congress to narrow Section 230's liability shield would be to create additional exceptions, as it did with FOSTA and SESTA[2]. If a lawsuit does not fall into one of the express exceptions contained in Section 230(e)[3], courts may have to engage in a highly fact-specific inquiry to determine whether Section 230 immunity applies: Section 230(c)(1) immunity will be inapplicable if the provider itself has developed or helped to develop the disputed content, while Section 230(c)(2) immunity may not apply if a service provider's decision to restrict access to content was not made in good faith.

Date Storage and Usage Considerations for Cities

Section 2 of the conditions the resolution applies to civil immunity requires that online platforms provide relevant information to law enforcement to assist in the identification and apprehension of persons who use the services of the platform to solicit and to engage in criminal activity. This section would most likely require the development of new procedures and protocols that govern law enforcements usage and retention of such information. Those new policies and procedures would undoubtedly raise privacy concerns depending on how wide the latitude is for law

[2] The Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) create an exception to Section 230 that means website publishers *would* be responsible if third parties are found to be posting ads for prostitution — including consensual sex work — on their platforms.

[3] Section 230(e) says that Section 230 will not apply to: (1) federal criminal laws; (2) intellectual property laws; (3) any state law that is "consistent with" Section 230; (4) the Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986; and (5) civil actions or state prosecutions where the underlying conduct violates federal law prohibiting sex trafficking.

enforcement to request such information. In those circumstances cities could end up themselves incurring new liability for the governance of data that could either violate certain privacy rules or increase their data governance costs.

Fiscal Impact:
Unlike the costly resources needed to support or oppose a ballot measure, a federal resolution from the League of California Cities that simply urges Congress to undertake certain action should have a negligible fiscal impact, if any monetary impact at all.

Regarding cities, if social media had no immunity for its failure to police content that solicits criminal activity, then an individual city could theoretically save thousands if not millions of dollars, depending on its size and other subjective circumstances. Collectively, cities across the country could potentially save at least hundreds of millions between redress for actual economic harm suffered and/or the cost of preventative measures taken to stop criminal activity from occurring in the first place.

Conversely, if social media platforms were to shut down, due to an inability to comply with a policy requirement to regulate speech on the internet, it is unclear on how cities might be impacted from a fiscal standpoint.

Existing League Policy:
Public Safety:
Law Enforcement
The League supports the promotion of public safety through:

- Stiffer penalties for violent offenders, and
- Protecting state Citizens' Option for Public Safety (COPS) and federal Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) funding and advocating for additional funding for local agencies to recoup the costs of crime and increase community safety.

Violence
The League supports the reduction of violence through strategies that address gang violence, domestic violence, and youth access to tools of violence, including but not limited to firearms, knives, etc.

The League supports the use of local, state, and federal collaborative prevention and intervention methods to reduce youth and gang violence.

Governance, Transparency & Labor Relations:
Private Sector Liability
The League will work closely with private sector representatives to evaluate the potential for League support of civil justice reform measures designed to improve the business climate in California. These measures should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis through the League police process.

Questions to Consider:
Many cities obviously believe that creating civil liability for social media platforms—due to their role in providing the communication mediums for those who organize looting attacks— is key to deterring this organized criminal activity.

If such a change was actually passed by Congress, it would force social media to essentially police every conversation on stakeholders' respective platforms, putting immense pressure on the industry to make subjective determinations about what conversations are appropriate and what are unacceptable.

At the end of the day, there are a few questions to consider in assessing this proposed resolution:

1) *What would this resolution's impact be on free speech and government censorship?*
2) *What are the expectations for cities when they receive information from a social media platform about a potentially credible threat in their respective communities? Does a city become liable for having information from a social media platform and the threat occurs?*
3) *What would the costs be to develop and maintain new data governance policies, including data infrastructure, to store this information?*
4) *What is the role of the League in engaging in issues relating to someone's privacy?*

Support:
The following letters of concurrence were received:
City of Hawaiian Gardens
City of Lakewood
City of Ontario
City of Rancho Cucamonga
City of Roseville

LETTERS OF CONCURRENCE

Resolution No. 1

Amendment to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996

CITY OF HAWAIIAN GARDENS

"Our Youth - Our Future"

August 7, 2020

John Dunbar, President
jdunbar@yville.com
League of California Cities
1400 K Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Dunbar:

On August 3, 2020, the Cerritos City Council approved to sponsor a **Resolution of the City Council of the City of Cerritos Submitting to the League of California Cities General Assembly a Proposed Resolution Regarding Support of Legislation Related to Social Media Platform Accountability for Promotion of Criminal Acts**.

This proposed resolution with the required background information will be submitted to the League of California Cities for consideration by the General Assembly at the Annual Conference on October 9, 2020. (Attachments 1 and 2) The intent of the resolution is to address the use of social medial platforms for posting information that leads followers to meet and commit crimes and to also hold these platforms and the persons who post said information civilly and criminally accountable for all costs incurred by the local jurisdictions where the crimes occurred.

The public safety efforts in the City of Hawaiian Gardens would certainly benefit from such legislation. This letter serves to support the City of Cerritos in their efforts to submit of the above mentioned resolution to the League of California Cities for consideration at the 2020 Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

Ernie Hernandez
City Manager

cc Blanca Pacheco, President, LA County Division/League of California Cities - bpacheco@downeyca.org
Meg Desmond, League of California Cities - mdesmond@cacities.org
Kristine Guerrero, LA County Division/League of California Cities - kguerrero@cacities.org
Kathy Matsumoto, Assistant City Manager, City of Cerritos – kmatsumoto@cerritos.us

21815 PIONEER BOULEVARD, HAWAIIAN GARDENS, CA 90716-1237 TEL: (562) 420-2641 FAX: (562) 496-3708

Jeff Wood
Vice Mayor

Steve Croft
Council Member

Ariel Pe
Council Member

Diane DuBois
Council Member

Todd Rogers
Mayor

August 5, 2020

John Dunbar, President
jdunbar@yville.com
League of California Cities
1400 K Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Dunbar:

On August 3, 2020, the Cerritos City Council approved to sponsor a **Resolution of the City Council of the City of Cerritos Submitting to the League of California Cities General Assembly a Proposed Resolution Regarding Support of Legislation Related to Social Media Platform Accountability for Promotion of Criminal Acts.**

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This letter serves to support the City of Cerritos in their efforts to submit the above mentioned resolution to the League of California Cities for consideration at the 2020 Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

Todd Rogers
Mayor

cc: Blanca Pacheco, President, LA County Division/League of California Cities - bpacheco@downeyca.org
Meg Desmond, League of California Cities - mdesmond@cacities.org
Kristine Guerrero, LA County Division/League of California Cities - kguerrero@cacities.org
Kathy Matsumoto, Assistant City Manager, City of Cerritos – kmatsumoto@cerritos.us

CITY OF ONTARIO

303 EAST "B" STREET, CIVIC CENTER ONTARIO CALIFORNIA 91764-4105 (909) 395-2000
FAX (909) 395-2070

PAUL S. LEON
MAYOR

DEBRA DORST-PORADA
MAYOR PRO TEM

ALAN D. WAPNER
JIM W. BOWMAN
RUBEN VALENCIA
COUNCIL MEMBERS

SCOTT OCHOA
CITY MANAGER

SHEILA MAUTZ
CITY CLERK

JAMES R. MILHISER
TREASURER

August 6, 2020

John Dunbar, President
jdunbar@yville.com
League of California Cities
1400 K Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Dunbar:

On August 3, 2020, the Cerritos City Council approved to sponsor a **Resolution of the City Council of the City of Cerritos Submitting to the League of California Cities General Assembly a Proposed Resolution Regarding Support of Legislation Related to Social Media Platform Accountability for Promotion of Criminal Acts**.

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This letter serves to support the City of Cerritos in their efforts to submit the above-mentioned resolution to the League of California Cities for consideration at the 2020 Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

Alan D. Wapner
Council Member
League of California Cities Board Member

c: Blanca Pacheco, President, LA County Division/League of California Cities - bpacheco@downeyca.org
Meg Desmond, League of California Cities - mdesmond@cacities.org
Kristine Guerrero, LA County Division/League of California Cities - kguerrero@cacities.org
Kathy Matsumoto, Assistant City Manager, City of Cerritos – kmatsumoto@cerritos.us

Mayor L. Dennis Michael | Mayor Pro Tem Lynne B. Kennedy
Council Members Ryan A. Hutchison, Kristine D. Scott, Sam Spagnolo
City Manager John R. Gillison

CITY OF RANCHO CUCAMONGA

10500 Civic Center Drive | Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730 | 909.477.2700 | www.CityofRC.us

August 6, 2020

John Dunbar, President
jdunbar@yville.com
League of California Cities
1400 K Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Dunbar:

On August 3, 2020, the Cerritos City Council approved to sponsor a **Resolution of the City Council of the City of Cerritos Submitting to the League of California Cities General Assembly a Proposed Resolution Regarding Support of Legislation Related to Social Media Platform Accountability for Promotion of Criminal Acts.**

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On behalf of the City of Rancho Cucamonga, this letter serves to support the City of Cerritos in their efforts to submit the above mentioned resolution to the League of California Cities for consideration at the 2020 Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

L. Dennis Michael
Mayor

cc: Blanca Pacheco, President, LA County Division/League of California Cities - bpacheco@downeyca.org
Meg Desmond, League of California Cities - mdesmond@cacities.org
Kristine Guerrero, LA County Division/League of California Cities - kguerrero@cacities.org
Kathy Matsumoto, Assistant City Manager, City of Cerritos – kmatsumoto@cerritos.us

CITY OF ROSEVILLE CALIFORNIA

City Council
311 Vernon Street
Roseville, California 95678

August 7, 2020

John Dunbar, President
jdunbar@yville.com
League of California Cities
1400 K Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Dunbar:

On August 3, 2020, the Cerritos City Council approved to sponsor a **Resolution of the City Council of the City of Cerritos Submitting to the League of California Cities General Assembly a Proposed Resolution Regarding Support of Legislation Related to Social Media Platform Accountability for Promotion of Criminal Acts**.

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On behalf of the City of Roseville, this letter serves to support the City of Cerritos in their efforts to submit the above mentioned resolution to the League of California Cities for consideration at the 2020 Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

John B. Allard II,
Mayor

Cc: Blanca Pacheco, President, LA County Division/League of California Cities - bpacheco@downeyca.org
Meg Desmond, League of California Cities - mdesmond@cacities.org
Kristine Guerrero, LA County Division/League of California Cities - kguerrero@cacities.org
Kathy Matsumoto, Assistant City Manager, City of Cerritos – kmatsumoto@cerritos.us
Jason Gonsalves, Joe A. Gonsalves and Son