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Tackling Misinformation and Disinformation in Los Angeles County

Across the country, communities are enduring the harmful impact of mounting misinformation and disinformation, which is often more prevalent and persistent than accurate information. Misinformation is false information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead, and disinformation is deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts such as propaganda. Discourse both online and in-person has become more acrimonious and polarized, leading to deep distrust of many government entities, community institutions, and journalism. This distrust has a real impact on people’s lives as it is easily exploitable, something we have clearly seen throughout the course of the coronavirus pandemic. Individuals have questioned scientific research and norms and rejected established facts. This has negatively impacted the health and wellbeing of residents throughout the County of Los Angeles (County) and may have depressed vaccine uptake in vulnerable communities. It has also resulted in an increase of racist hate crimes against communities of color. Bad actors have taken

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advantage of misinformation or develop disinformation themselves to scam consumers by pushing for “miracle” cures. And, more dangerously, it has potentially prolonged and worsened the pandemic, costing countless lives and economic suffering.

Misinformation and disinformation have effects beyond the pandemic. It has exacerbated some of society’s worst problems and threatens to undermine our democracy. We have been prime witnesses to the impacts of both disinformation and misinformation in our elections. Fair and free elections are the staple of our democracy. Yet inaccurate information has frayed trust in those key systems and institutions that protect our democracy. False claims about elections are widely disseminated across social media platforms often overwhelming the capacity of local election officials to counter and educate the public about how elections work. The January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, where hundreds of police officers were attacked under a false and unproven premise that the 2020 election was “stolen”, was a direct result of unmitigated conspiracy theories and a narrative of false information about the elections process.

Social media companies have not responded to the crisis in a meaningful way. They have been unsuccessful at stopping misinformation, disinformation, and fake news from disseminating throughout their online platforms, particularly in languages other than English. For instance, Facebook was used to spark violence against ethnic minorities in Myanmar and journalists in the Philippines.¹ In November 2021, the LA Times² reported that companies like Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, do a

¹ [Social media misinformation is bad in English. But it's far worse in Spanish. - The Washington Post](#)

² [Latinx Files: Facebook's Latinx disinformation problem - Los Angeles Times \(latimes.com\)](#)

particularly poor job tackling misinformation within the Latino community. This may have suppressed voter turnout and discouraged Latinos from participating in the 2020 Census.

Organizations nationwide are looking for ways to tackle the spread of misleading information. The Aspen Institute established a “Commission on Information Disorder” and published a report³ to help decision-makers face this crisis. The National Association of Secretaries of State has created a #TrustedInfo2022 campaign to help election administrators across the country tackle misinformation that undermines free and fair elections. By adopting and expanding upon best practices from these reports and information campaigns, the County can empower departments to take countermeasures against propaganda, disinformation and fake news which could help its residents mitigate the adverse impacts of misinformation/disinformation and protect the institutions that make our democracy strong.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office (CEO), in consultation with the Internal Services Department, the Acting Chief Information Officer (CIO), the CEO’s Countywide Communications Office, the Registrar Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC), the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, the Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Department of Public Health, and other departments as applicable to:

1. Develop a Countywide Communications Toolkit which includes strategic and sustainable misinformation/disinformation countermeasures that focus on empowering departments to conduct education, outreach, and communication to

³ [Commission on Information Disorder Final Report - The Aspen Institute](#)

impacted County communities on misinformation/disinformation of the highest significance, including but not limited to those issues that undermine County services or could cause widespread harm. These efforts should include:

- a. Developing and implementing misinformation/disinformation education and awareness initiatives in various priority areas, including but not limited to voting, public records, immigration, consumer protection, and health.
 - b. Working with trusted institutions such as libraries, hospitals, schools, parks and ethnic/mainstream media news to identify and expand measures against misinformation.
 - c. Gathering best practices including from National Association of Secretaries of State #TrustedInfo2022 initiative and the Aspen Institute's Commission on Information Disorder.
2. Because misinformation and disinformation are replete online and in social media, a consultant shall also define the types of misinformation/disinformation that demand a County departmental response to ensure departments are best able to prioritize their limited public outreach resources. Using the Countywide Communications Toolkit as the basis for standardized misinformation/disinformation countermeasures, work with all impacted departments to ensure they implement the best practices identified in the Toolkit to ensure a consistent and effective Countywide response to misinformation/disinformation.
3. Report back in 120 days in writing on the progress of Toolkit development, followed by a closeout report at the conclusion of all work with impacted departments.

4. Within 45 days, deliver a 5-signature letter to the Chief Executive Officers of major social media, instant messaging, and other relevant companies requesting that their organizations make investments in online education campaigns and platform product features to increase users' awareness and resistance to online misinformation, including investments in tackling misinformation in content that is culturally appropriate and available in multiple languages.

WE | FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the RR/CC to:

5. Pilot a public education initiative as recommended by the National Association of Secretaries of State and its #TrustedInfo2022 campaign including:
 - a. Developing and implementing a public education campaign to promote election officials as the trusted sources of election information.
 - b. Continue creating and implementing a communications and outreach strategy to reach and keep English and non-English speaking County residents informed about elections, including:
 - i. Media: Print, TV, and social platforms;
 - ii. Trusted partners: Community navigators, promotoras, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders;
 - iii. Public venues: County-owned spaces, art sites, and community-congregating locations.
 - c. Enhance efforts to build out and disseminate digital and print resources in various languages to maximize outreach to all County communities.
6. Report back 60 days in writing following the certification of the November 2022

Gubernatorial General Elections on the results of the public education initiative with recommendations on codifying best practices for future elections and other areas where misinformation causes harm to residents.

WE I FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

7. Direct the CEO Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch to support State and Federal proposals that combat misinformation and disinformation related to elections, immigration, consumer affairs, and public health matters.
8. Authorize the CEO to enter into an agreement with a consultant, with the agreement approved as to form by County Counsel, to assist in meeting Directive 1 above.

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