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*Via email: [jeff\\_hantson@hirono.senate.gov](mailto:jeff_hantson@hirono.senate.gov)*

The Honorable Senator Mazie K. Hirono of Hawaii  
The Honorable Senator Cory A. Booker of New Jersey  
The Honorable Senator Margaret Wood Hassan of New Hampshire

Dear Senators:

Thank you for your April 13 correspondence (the “Letter”) inquiring about GoDaddy’s efforts to combat coronavirus-related fraud. We share your concerns regarding such frauds and are happy to provide this response describing GoDaddy’s ongoing commitment to combat them. Sadly, throughout our more than 20-year history, we have seen bad actors on the Internet seeking to profit from natural disasters and other tragedies. As a result, we have developed robust procedures to protect consumers, while at the same time ensuring legitimate domain name holders can register domains and establish websites and email accounts.

As your Letter notes, several legitimate organizations have registered coronavirus-related domains and used them to establish websites that can provide critical — perhaps even lifesaving — information to the public. You will find below that we have supplemented our ordinary procedures in these extraordinary times in order to further protect the public. Our efforts have been recognized by, among others, the New York State Attorney General who has thanked GoDaddy for “doing the right thing” and encouraged “other companies [to] follow your lead.”

#### **I. Background Regarding GoDaddy**

Since GoDaddy’s founding in 1997, we’ve been a champion for entrepreneurs and small businesses. Today, we have approximately 78M domain names under management, and over 19M customers worldwide.

When a customer registers a domain name with GoDaddy, that domain name is simply associated with an IP address on the Internet. (As you know, an IP address is a numeric identifier that points all Internet traffic to some form of specific content.) Because IP addresses are not easily committed to memory and are not user friendly, domain names were created. For example, typing the IP address <http://104.238.65.160/> into your browser will take you to the GoDaddy website, but it is a lot easier to type GoDaddy.com into the browser.

Domain names on their own do not contain content. They can direct Internet traffic, or be associated with an email address (e.g., [support@godaddy.com](mailto:support@godaddy.com)). But that doesn’t happen at the time of registration, if at all. It only happens when the owner of the domain name takes additional steps to specifically set up a website or email account associated with that domain name.

At the time of domain name registration, it is impossible for a domain name registrar to know whether any content — much less what kind of content — will be associated with the domain name, or whether it will be associated with an email address. This is especially true as we register, on average, one domain name per second, through an entirely automated process.

## II. GoDaddy has a long history of acting quickly when its services are misused

Although it is not feasible for a domain name registrar like GoDaddy to know at the time of purchase whether a customer will use any of our products and services for nefarious purposes, we have an established history of taking action when such misuse is brought to our attention. We take our responsibility towards our customers and the broader Internet community very seriously. Our Universal Terms of Service Agreement (UTOS) expressly prohibits a variety of conduct. For example, customers cannot use our products and services for any illegal activity (e.g., botnets, spam, phishing, malware, intellectual property infringement, child exploitation) or for promoting or encouraging terrorism or violence against people/animals/property.<sup>1</sup>

Our UTOS is more than just words. For 20+ years, we have made significant investments in teams, tools, and technologies to review all complaints alleging violations of our UTOS or any other possible misuse of our products and services. We promptly investigate complaints received from customers, third parties, brand owners, law enforcement, and government agencies. Complaints are easily reported online via <https://www.godaddy.com/help/reporting-abuse-27154> and then routed to the appropriate team. In fact, we have dedicated teams for reviewing and addressing the following complaints:

- intellectual property infringement;
- spam/phishing/malware and other similar behavior;
- content issues (e.g., defamation, fake pharmacies);
- privacy and/or data protection regulations; and
- child exploitative material

Our process and teams have served the Internet community well, as we have brought an end to countless scams and proactively worked with law enforcement to stop bad actors in their tracks. In fact, through these processes and before receipt of your Letter, GoDaddy supplemented its standard, robust abuse procedures to more quickly manage and review potential issues related to COVID abuse reports. On March 26, 2020, GoDaddy announced the establishment of a COVID-19 rapid response abuse procedure through [COVIDabuse@GoDaddy.com](mailto:COVIDabuse@GoDaddy.com). Through its blog, GoDaddy proactively encouraged the public to “submit any reports of COVID-19 abuse or fraud on GoDaddy’s platform” to the newly dedicated email address so that GoDaddy can rapidly review COVID-specific complaints and take appropriate actions. To date, GoDaddy has investigated and took action with respect to several coronavirus-related complaints. Our vigilance in this area will continue, even after the current COVID-19 situation ends.

In addition, the Letter posed several specific questions about our processes. Questions 1 - 5 inquire about GoDaddy’s processes for investigating fraudulent schemes and other malicious conduct, including our processes for investigating those who register domain names and then use them in such schemes. As noted earlier, it isn’t possible for us to ascertain whether fraud will ultimately occur at the time of domain name registration. Oftentimes, public agencies, private companies, and individuals register domain names without any intention of creating web content or associating the domain name with an email account. Instead, they simply forward the domain name to other website content providing legitimate information. Therefore, any automated process could result in the erroneous suspension of an official news or beneficial

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, our UTOS “expressly reserves the right to deny, cancel, terminate, suspend, lock, or modify access to (or control of) any Account or Services (including the right to cancel or transfer any domain name registration) for any reason... (as determined by GoDaddy in its sole and absolute discretion).” We also have various product-specific user agreements, but our UTOS is the “North Star” with respect to our customers’ purchase and use of our various products and services.

public-information site and be an infringement on free speech.

As a result, if we receive a complaint about potentially fraudulent content, GoDaddy has a human review process that results in effective detection and identification of fraudulent content, while at the same time respecting important free speech concerns. Among other things, that process ensures that legitimate uses of coronavirus-related domains, including the ones identified in your Letter, are not erroneously rejected. These domains underscore the careful balance that GoDaddy has struck, respecting free speech protections while swiftly and aggressively combating identified frauds.

Questions 6 and 7 of the Letter ask about penalties imposed on those found to be using their registered domains for unlawful or harmful activity, and our work with law enforcement. We believe that aggressive enforcement of the illegal use of domains (whether coronavirus-related or otherwise) is both appropriate and necessary. As described above, not only does our UTOS prohibit illegal activity and provide us with discretion to act against any domain or website involved in fraud/illegal activities, but GoDaddy already has invoked its UTOS in combatting coronavirus-related fraud even before receipt of your Letter.

In appropriate circumstances, GoDaddy makes referrals to law enforcement partners regarding such activities. GoDaddy is incredibly proud of our long history of working with a wide variety of local, national, federal, and international law enforcement organizations in making the Internet a safe place. For nearly 10 years, GoDaddy has maintained a dedicated channel for law enforcement inquiries - [LEO@GoDaddy.com](mailto:LEO@GoDaddy.com). Complaints to this channel are reviewed by our team within 24 hours.

Questions 8 and 9 seek, among other things, information about our registration process and whether we block users from registering domains incorporating certain terms — including “virus,” “pandemic,” and “vaccine” — or has otherwise taken action against such domains. It’s important to note that GoDaddy’s registration process is entirely automated and, on average, processes more than one domain name per second. Since January 1, 2020, GoDaddy has registered an average of 1.6 million domains per month.

As noted above, at the time that a domain is registered, we do not know whether it will be used for nefarious purposes or legitimate ends. That is why GoDaddy’s processes rely on human review of abuse complaints, which ensures the public is protected while not interfering with free expression. Those processes are also important because, unfortunately, we have seen — and taken action against — fraudsters who have used seemingly benign domain names unrelated to the coronavirus crisis to engage in COVID-related schemes. Since establishing our COVID-19 rapid response procedures more than three weeks ago, we have received and investigated approximately 870 complaints through [COVIDabuse@GoDaddy.com](mailto:COVIDabuse@GoDaddy.com) and have suspended approximately 151 domains as a result.

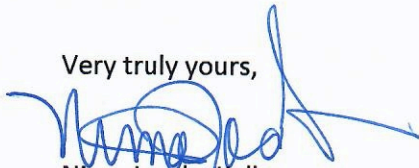
Questions 10 - 13 are similar to questions 8 and 9 but seek information regarding certain pharmaceutical terms and trademarks. In addition to the abuse mitigation processes described above, GoDaddy’s UTOS expressly prohibits conduct that violates the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008, or the intellectual property rights of others. We aggressively enforce these terms against any domain or website that is used to operate illegal online pharmacies or to market controlled substances. For example, last year we partnered with security researchers to identify and remove domains that are used in connection with schemes to peddle bogus pharmaceuticals. *See, e.g.,* <https://www.wired.com/story/godaddy-spam-takedown-subdomains-snake-oil/>. We also work closely with the Food and Drug Administration and the monitoring service LegitScript to detect and investigate pharmaceutical sites on our platform.

*United States' Senators Hirono, Booker and Hassan  
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Additionally, while terms like “teams” and “zoom” and “classroom” are common generic words, we acknowledge they could potentially be used in conjunction with a cyberattack on video conferencing platforms operated by Microsoft, Zoom, and Google. Our Digital Crimes Unit (DCU) regularly works with law enforcement agencies and cybersecurity firms to mitigate any malware, denial of service, or phishing attacks originating from our network. We maintain a channel to report intellectual property infringement at TrademarkClaims@GoDaddy.com and ask that any company report infringement of their trademarks or brands through that address.

We reiterate our appreciation for your Letter and your concerns regarding this important topic. GoDaddy remains committed to continue to protect the public — both by preventing frauds and by ensuring the protection of the free speech rights of legitimate domain name registrants, particularly where they seek to disseminate critical and perhaps lifesaving information about the coronavirus crisis. Thank you for your attention to these important efforts.

Very truly yours,



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