

To whom it may concern

The proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 raises significant red flags and demands strong opposition due to its potential for government censorship and overreach. While the battle against misinformation and disinformation is undoubtedly crucial, this bill's approach risks undermining core democratic values and the essence of open discourse. Here are several compelling reasons why this bill should be vehemently contested:

- 1. Suppression of Free Expression:** The bill has the potential to be a breeding ground for government censorship and curtailment of free expression. Granting authorities broad powers to label content as misinformation or disinformation raises the specter of the government determining what is acceptable speech. This can lead to a chilling effect, where individuals and media outlets self-censor out of fear of repercussions, stifling the free flow of ideas.
- 2. Erosion of Privacy:** The bill's enforcement mechanisms might require intrusive monitoring of online activities and interactions. This invasion of privacy to identify and penalize those sharing allegedly false information could set a concerning precedent, allowing governments to surveil their citizens under the guise of combating misinformation.
- 3. Selective Enforcement and Political Bias:** Government bodies tasked with determining what qualifies as misinformation could inadvertently introduce bias and favor certain narratives. The risk of weaponizing this authority to target dissenting voices or unpopular opinions becomes very real. Such selective enforcement undermines the bill's credibility and undermines the foundations of a democratic society.
- 4. Dynamic Nature of Information:** The bill's attempt to define and restrict misinformation fails to account for the dynamic nature of information dissemination. What is considered misinformation today might evolve into truth tomorrow. The bill's rigidity in addressing evolving narratives inhibits the natural course of scientific inquiry and the revision of historical perspectives.
- 5. Alternative Voices and Innovation:** Censoring discussions labeled as misinformation stifles the progress of society by restricting the very conversations that can drive innovation and challenge established norms. The discomfort of alternative viewpoints often paves the way for groundbreaking discoveries and paradigm shifts.
- 6. Stifling Accountability and Whistleblowing:** In an era where whistleblowers and investigative journalists play a critical role in holding powerful entities accountable, the bill's threat of legal action against sharing information without absolute certainty discourages those who seek to expose wrongdoing or unethical practices.
- 7. Unintended Consequences on Innovation:** The bill might lead online platforms to adopt an overly cautious stance, stifling creativity and inhibiting the exploration of novel ideas. This would hinder the growth of vibrant online communities and stifle digital innovation.
- 8. Media Literacy and Critical Thinking:** A more effective way to counter misinformation is through education and promoting media literacy. Fostering critical thinking skills empowers individuals to assess information for

themselves, rather than relying solely on government-determined sources.

In conclusion, while the fight against misinformation is critical, the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 threatens to trample on fundamental principles of democracy, free expression, and individual autonomy. Rather than relying on government censorship, a more prudent approach involves bolstering media literacy, and encouraging robust public discourse. The risk of enabling government overreach and stifling vital conversations far outweighs the potential benefits of this bill.

Sincerely,

Jay Ferrante