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Facebook falling short in fighting hate speech, N.J. attorney general says

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New Jersey's top law enforcement official has accused Facebook of not doing enough to combat hate groups, and he asked the social media giant to open its doors to outside investigators and allow users to report problems directly to staff, among other reforms.

In a Wednesday letter, State Attorney General Gurbir Grewal and 19 other attorneys general from around the country wrote the company had "fallen short" policing itself. Facebook needed to more aggressively enforce its own policies and revise its algorithms so users were less likely to be directed to extremists, they said.

"While Facebook has—on occasion—taken action to address violations," the officials wrote, "we know that everyday users of Facebook can find the process slow, frustrating, and ineffective."

The letter came not long after CEO Mark Zuckerberg faced questions from federal lawmakers about Facebook's size and dominance, and as the company grapples with how to respond to misinformation from President Donald Trump.

"Facebook has ample resources to do far more than it has been doing," Grewal said in a statement, and he cited a recent audit that concluded the company's "approach to civil rights remains too reactive and piecemeal." The review also said harassment remains a persistent problem.

A Facebook spokesman said the company is working on curbing hate speech.

"Hate speech is an issue across the internet and we are working to make Facebook as safe as possible by investing billions to keep hate off our platform and fight misinformation," spokesman Daniel Roberts said in a statement. "We share the Attorneys General's goal of ensuring people feel safe on the internet and look forward to continuing our work with them."

Facebook tracks violators online, and it recently reported an increasing amount of hate speech. The company flagged about 9.6 million instances of "violent or dehumanizing speech" at the beginning of the year, compared with 1.6 million at the end of 2017.

Officials also asked the company to make it easier for users to block groups of people and beef up oversight of "inflammatory advertisements that vilify minority groups."

Grewal has criticized the social media giant before, especially regarding hate speech. Facebook took down a page accused of anti-Semitism in February, after weathering months of criticism from the attorney general and Gov. Phil Murphy.