

Facebook agrees to remove school shooting pages (Update)

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Facebook has agreed to remove some so-called tribute pages related to last year's Connecticut school shooting over concerns they're being used to exploit the tragedy, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Monday.

Blumenthal and other lawmakers from the state requested the removal of offending pages in a letter to Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg on Monday.

The lawmakers said some pages purportedly set up to honor the victims of the Dec. 14 shooting have been used to exploit or harass the victims' families and could be used as vehicles for financial fraud.

The lawmakers also said the pages also appear to violate Facebook's terms of use, which prohibit users from creating accounts for anyone other than themselves.

In the letter, the lawmakers said they know of more than 100 pages dedicated just one of the victims, teacher Victoria Soto.

Some contain postings from conspiracy theorists who claim the shootings were staged and that Soto and others were actors.

"Certainly there have been many, too many, of these pages that are intimidating or harassing or exploitive," Blumenthal said. "I'm pleased that Facebook has responded positively."

The lawmakers said Facebook also had received complaints from Soto's family and the family of Kaitlin Roig, a teacher who survived and has been credited with saving the lives of her students by locking the class in a small bathroom and barricading the door.

A Facebook page titled "Kaitlin Roig is a Hero" prompted some abusive posts, such as one that reads, "Congratulations Kaitlin or whatever your name is.. Now you're famous and got to meet the 'President.' You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

That post was still on the page Monday afternoon.

Blumenthal said his office received a phone call Monday from Facebook officials saying they had begun removing the pages immediately.

Jodi Seth, a Facebook spokesperson, said in a statement that the company has been working closely since December with officials, the families and their representatives to respond quickly to concerns with dedicated staff handling complaints over Sandy Hook pages.

Seth said Facebook wants to respond quickly "while also recognizing that people across the country want to express grief for a terrible national tragedy."

"We will continue to be vigilant," Seth said in a statement.

Blumenthal said they are not asking that all tribute or donation pages be removed, just the ones that are not authorized by the families.

One fraud arrest already has been connected to a Facebook posting on the shooting

Nouel Alba, a 37-year-old New York City woman, is accused of using

her Facebook account, telephone calls and text messages to seek donations for what she called a "funeral fund." She allegedly told one donor that she had to enter the scene of the mass shooting to identify her nephew, according to the criminal complaint.

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