

## **22 Rights Groups Tell PayPal and Venmo to Shape Up Account Freezes and Closures**

### **Companies Have History of Unfair Crackdowns on First-Amendment Protected Activities**

San Francisco – Nearly two dozen rights groups, including PDX Privacy, have joined together to tell PayPal and its subsidiary Venmo to shape up its policies on account freezes and closures, as its opaque practices are interfering with payment systems connected to many First-Amendment protected activities.

"No one should be cut off from the ability to send and receive money arbitrarily or for unclear reasons," said PDX Privacy activist Boaz. When those reasons may be political, such as pressure from governments, this is all the more dangerous."

The coalition sent a letter to PayPal and Venmo today, voicing particular concern about account closures that seem to have been used to pressure or single-out websites that host controversial—but legal—content. PayPal shut down the account of online bookseller Smashwords over concern about erotic fiction, and also refused to process payments to the whistleblower website Wikileaks. Last year, Venmo was sued for targeting payments associated with Islam or Arab nationalities or ethnicity, and there are also numerous examples of sex worker advocates facing account closures.

Today's letter calls on PayPal and Venmo to provide more transparency and accountability around its policies and practices for account freezes and closures, including publishing regular transparency reports, providing meaningful notice to users, and offering a timely and meaningful appeals process. These recommendations are in alignment with the Santa Clara Principles on Transparency and Accountability in Content Moderation, a set of principles developed by free expression advocates and scholars to help companies center human rights when moderating user-generated content and accounts.

"The internet is ruled by the online marketplace and consumers," said PDX Privacy organizer Aire. "The relationship between consumers and the market is simple: consumers demand and the suppliers meet those demands. Consumers online are now demanding online transparency. It is thus necessary for online businesses to respond with transparency in their services and conduct; businesses should be clear about their intentions and reasons to censor users, as well as provide notice to users about what activity or interaction with their services will cause a violation to occur. Businesses should also be clear on what user information will be collected, analyzed, or sold."

The signers of today's letter include 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, Access, ACLU of Northern California, American Civil Liberties Union, Article 19, the

Center for Democracy and Technology, Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research (CLEAR), Demand Progress Education Fund, Electronic Frontier Foundation, European Legal Support Center (ELSC), Fight for the Future, Freedom of the Press Foundation, Global Voices, Masaar-Technology and Law Community, Mnemonic, New America's Open Technology Institute, PDX Privacy, the Tor Project, Taraaz, Ranking Digital Rights, Restore the Fourth Minnesota, and SMEX.

For the full letter to PayPal and Venmo:

<https://www.eff.org/document/letter-paypal-and-venmo-eff-and-others>

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