

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

November 15, 2024

Mr. Gabe Newell  
Chief Executive Officer  
Valve Corporation  
10400 NE 4th St. Floor 14  
Bellevue, WA 98004

Dear Mr. Newell:

I write to you today regarding the hate and extremism that has recently been identified on your gaming digital distribution and social networking platform Steam. Recently, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) released a report<sup>1</sup> where ADL identified over 1 million unique user accounts and nearly 100,000 user-created groups that glorified antisemitic, Nazi, white supremacist, gender- and sexuality-based hate, and other extremist ideologies on Valve's Steam platform.

It has been brought to your attention before that extremist ideologies seem to find a home on Steam. In 2022, Valve received a Senate letter identifying *nearly identical activity* on your platform, and yet two years later it appears that Valve has chosen to continue a 'hands off'-type approach to content moderation that favors allowing some users to engage in sustained bouts of disturbing and violent rhetoric rather than ensure that all of its users can find a welcoming and safe environment across your platform.

My concern is elevated by the fact that Steam is the largest single online gaming digital distribution and social networking platform in the world with over 100 million unique user accounts and a userbase similar in scale to that of the 'traditional' social media and social network platforms. Steam is financially successful, with a dominant position in its sector, and makes Valve billions of dollars in annual revenue. Until now, Steam has largely not received its due attention as a de facto major social network where its users engage in many of the same activities expected of a social media platform.

ADL also found that, in addition to the extremely concerning number of hateful account and user groups:

- Almost 900,000 users with extremist or antisemitic profile pictures
- 40,000 groups with names that included hateful words, with the most prominent being "1488", "shekel" and "white power"

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<sup>1</sup> ADL Center on Extremism, *Steam-Powered Hate: The World's Most Popular Gaming Platform is a Conduit for Extremism and Antisemitism* (2024).

- Rampant use of text-based images (so-called “cospypasta” or “ASCII art”), particularly of swastikas, resulting in over 1 million unique hate-images.

Valve has a Steam Online Conduct policy (“Conduct Policy”) and a Steam Subscriber Agreement (“Agreement”) that Steam subscribers agree to abide by as a condition of using the service. The Conduct Policy requires that “[in] general, as a Steam user you should be a good online citizen and not do anything that prevents any other Steam user from using and enjoying Steam”. The Conduct Policy explicitly directs subscribers to not:

- “Engage in unlawful activity [including] encouraging real-world violence...”
- “Upload or post illegal or inappropriate content [including] [real] or disturbing depictions of violence...”
- “Violate others’ personal rights”
- “Harass other users or Steam personnel [which includes not engaging in] trolling; baiting; threatening; spamming; intimidating; and using abusive language or insults.”

It is reasonable to question how committed Valve is to effectively implement and enforce Valve’s own, self-created Conduct Policy for its users, in light of the 1 million Steam user accounts and 100,000 user-created groups glorifying hateful ideologies that ADL found. We have seen on other social networking platforms that lax enforcement of the letter of user conduct agreements, when coupled with a seeming reluctance by those companies to embrace the spirit (namely providing users with a safe, welcoming place to socialize) of those same agreements, leads to toxic social environments that elevate harassment and abuse. You should want your users (and prospective users) to not have to wonder if they or their children will be harassed, intimidated, ridiculed or otherwise face abuse.

As Black Friday and the holiday buying season approaches, the American public should know that not only is Steam an unsafe place for teens and young adults to purchase and play online games, but also that, absent a change in Valve’s approach to user moderation and the type of behavior that it welcomes on its platform, Steam is playing a clear role in allowing harmful ideologies to spread and take root among the next generation.

Valve must bring its content moderation practices in line with industry standards or face more intense scrutiny from the federal government for its complicity in allowing hate groups to congregate and engage in activities that undoubtedly puts Americans at risk.

Please provide answers to the following questions no later than December 13, 2024. Please provide answers in-line with the questions, and not a narrative that attempts to answer multiple questions.

1. Please describe Valve’s current practices used to enforce its terms of service.
2. Please provide the definition that Valve uses internally to define each of the following terms and/or behaviors from the Conduct Policy in order to evaluate potential violations of said policy:
  - a. “Encouraging real-world violence”;

- b. “Inappropriate content”;
    - c. “Real or disturbing depictions of violence”;
    - d. “Violate others’ personal rights”; and
    - e. “Harass other users or Steam personnel”, including:
      - i. trolling;
      - ii. baiting;
      - iii. threatening;
      - iv. intimidating; and
      - v. abusive language or insults.
3. How many allegations did Valve receive from users about potential violations of the Conduct Policy? Include in your response each date when the Conduct Policy was changed, updated, or otherwise modified. Please provide data sufficient to answer this question for each of the following:
  - a. Each month of each of the years of 2014 to 2024;
  - b. Each category of violation (however Valve tracks types or categories of violations of the policy);
  - c. Each category of violation for each month of each of the years of 2014 to 2024;
  - d. The disposition and/or any findings of each complaint received (this may be presented in aggregate) by Valve, whether through Steam’s internal reporting mechanisms or any other means, and subsequent action taken by Valve in response to each complaint (this may be presented in aggregate).
  - e. The number of unique user accounts that were subject to adverse, punitive, or corrective actions by Valve:
    - i. In response to a user-generated complaint; and
    - ii. In response to violations identified by Valve moderators of their own accord.
  - f. For item e, above, please provide data on unique payment methods (e.g. credit card accounts, PayPal or similar payment method accounts, JCB, Klarna, Paysafecard, and any other payment methods accepted on Steam that are uniquely identifiable) associated with each account subject to adverse, punitive, or corrective actions by Valve that was subsequently used for any other account (this may be presented on aggregate).
4. Approximately how many human content moderators work for Steam?
  - a. How many of those moderators are in-house Valve employees?
  - b. How many of those moderators are contracted by Valve?
  - c. Does Steam supplement this work with AI-content moderation systems? If so, describe the ways in which any AI system is deployed for that purpose, including any evaluation process that Valve carried out to test any such system and the results that demonstrate the efficacy of any such system in identifying and/or removing content that violates the Conduct Policy and Subscriber Agreement.
5. What steps does Valve take to prevent, monitor, and mitigate extremist, white supremacist, and terrorism-related content?

6. What commitments will Steam make to ensure that it has meaningfully curbed white supremacist, antisemitic, terroristic, Nazi, homophobic, transphobic, misogynist, and hateful content by November 15, 2025?
7. What transparency measures does Valve plan to implement to inform users and the public about content moderation actions related to extremists and behavior that could be reasonably interpreted as endorsing extremist thoughts, beliefs, and/or actions on the platform?
8. The research shows a period from late 2019 to mid-2020 where it appears Valve may have stepped up its moderation of certain types of hateful content on Steam. Can you provide more detail on your content moderation practices during this time?
9. How frequently does Valve evaluate its content moderation practices related to extremism?
  - a. How frequently do those evaluations result in changes, updates, or other modifications to Valve's content moderation practices related to extremism?
10. Has Steam, or Valve, made policy, enforcement, or practical decisions that have had the effect of limiting or its content moderation? If so, provide the date(s) of each decision and enough information to understand the context and analysis that led to each decision.

I greatly appreciate your swift attention to this matter and look forward to reviewing your response.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator