

SENATE RESOLUTION No. 55

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Sponsored by:
Senator JOSEPH P. CRYAN
District 20 (Union)

SYNOPSIS

Urges social media websites to halt posts discussing ongoing emergency events.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **A SENATE RESOLUTION** urging social media websites to halt posts
2 discussing an ongoing emergency event.
3
4 **WHEREAS**, Social media use is growing among America’s public and
5 has become an alternative source of news for many users; and
6 **WHEREAS**, Social media allows for the prompt spread of information
7 across large geographical areas, which makes social media a useful
8 tool for law enforcement agencies to use when updating the public
9 during emergency events; and
10 **WHEREAS**, However, social media websites do not require fact-
11 checking and often allow for the rapid spread of misinformation by
12 its users, which can become especially problematic during
13 emergency events; and
14 **WHEREAS**, The United States Department of Homeland Security
15 reports that misinformation can be spread on social media websites
16 both intentionally and unintentionally when the truth concerning an
17 incident is difficult to confirm, and that misinformation during
18 emergency events tends to increase when law enforcement agencies
19 are slow to provide updates to the public concerning the incident;
20 and
21 **WHEREAS**, A recent school lockdown emergency in Union, New
22 Jersey was exacerbated by inaccurate posts within a Facebook
23 group forum stating that a student within the school was armed with
24 a firearm; a claim that was found to be false after a lengthy multi-
25 agency response to the threat, which included the Union County
26 Police Department, Union County Prosecutor’s Office, Union
27 County Emergency Response Team, and K-9 units from the Union,
28 Somerset, and Middlesex County Sheriff’s departments; and
29 **WHEREAS**, Many hoax threats of targeted violence, such as bomb
30 threats, are also posted on social media websites which divert
31 limited law enforcement resources and are costly for taxpayers; and
32 **WHEREAS**, Inaccurate social media posts can also lead to dangerous
33 unintended consequences; in the weeks following the terrorist
34 attack at the 2013 Boston Marathon, social media was utilized in an
35 effort to identify the two primary suspects of the attack, which lead
36 to the misidentification of a suspect and caused the misidentified
37 person to take their own life; and
38 **WHEREAS**, Following Hurricane Harvey in 2017, misinformation was
39 spread on Twitter stating that emergency shelters would be
40 checking the immigration status of those seeking shelter; a rumor
41 which discouraged immigrants who were displaced by the storm
42 from seeking assistance; and
43 **WHEREAS**, Social media websites should acknowledge the role they
44 play in the dissemination of information during emergency events
45 and halt posts discussing ongoing emergency events, so that
46 accurate information concerning the incidents can be shared to the
47 public by the appropriate agencies; now, therefore,

1 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate of the State of New Jersey:*

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3 1. This House urges social media websites to halt posts
4 discussing an ongoing emergency event.

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6 2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,
7 shall be transmitted by the Secretary of the Senate to the Chief
8 Executive Officers of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Reddit.

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STATEMENT

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13 This resolution urges the country's most frequently utilized
14 social media websites to halt posts discussing ongoing emergency
15 events. Social media has become a commonly used tool for the
16 public to gain access to news updates, including updates during
17 emergency events. However, much of the information shared during
18 these emergency events may be inaccurate.

19 The spread of misinformation on social media websites during
20 emergency events can escalate emergencies as they are occurring
21 and hinder emergency response efforts. Misinformation spread on
22 social media websites during an emergency can also result in the
23 diversion of limited law enforcement resources, heightened costs
24 for taxpayers, and dangerous unintended consequences. It is
25 imperative that social media websites recognize their role in the
26 dissemination of information during emergency events and that they
27 halt posts discussing ongoing emergency events.

28 Limiting discussion of ongoing emergency events will help to
29 limit the spread of misinformation during emergency events.