



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
STATE OF ILLINOIS

**Lisa Madigan**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

October 28, 2013

Marissa Meyer  
CEO, President and Director  
Yahoo! Inc.  
701 First Avenue  
Sunnyvale, CA 94089

Dear Ms. Meyer:

Last month, Reuters published a series of articles documenting an extremely troubling practice known as “re-homing,” where parents used the Internet to find strangers willing to take their children on a permanent basis. The placements documented in the articles occurred outside the adoption laws of any state and with very little, if any, oversight conducted by the parents, making them very dangerous for the children involved.<sup>1</sup>

The articles noted that your company’s website was used to host at least one group apparently dedicated to facilitating placements such as these. Because these placements can be very dangerous for the children involved, I am writing to request that your website not host groups facilitating this type of conduct.

Although the specific circumstances documented in the articles differed in varying degrees, a similar, dangerous pattern emerged in each account. Stressed, overwhelmed parents of adopted, foreign-born children decided that they could no longer care for their children. Rather than seek support from established social service agencies and work through the proper legal channels, they chose to operate outside of the laws designed to protect children. They located groups on the Internet discussing “re-homing” children and after posting the equivalent of advertisements for their children, or reading advertisements posted by individuals interested in taking children, these parents found individuals, often hundreds of miles from their homes, who would take their children. With no oversight and no background checks, these parents then abandoned their children by permanently leaving them with people they had recently met through the Internet.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Child Exchange: Inside America’s Underground Market for Adopted Children* (Sep. 9, 2013).

The actions of these parents are clear violations of the law in every state, as it is illegal to place a child in a home in another state without first notifying the appropriate officials of that state and complying with the other requirements of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). Every state in the country has ratified the ICPC. In ratifying it, the states recognized that children should receive “the maximum opportunity to be placed in a suitable environment” and that, to achieve that goal, the appropriate authorities in a state where a child is placed need a “full opportunity to ascertain the circumstances of the proposed placement.”<sup>2</sup> Based on the Reuters series, the individuals facilitating “re-homing” arrangements via the Internet are not notifying the appropriate child welfare authorities and, consequently, are violating the law in any state where the conduct occurs.

I understand the difficulty your company faces as it balances freedom of speech protections with the equally important challenge of limiting troubling content. Yet, in cases such as these, where illegal acts of “re-homing” are occurring, or likely to occur, there is no justification for allowing this conduct to continue unabated on Yahoo.

Yahoo can serve as a resource and outlet for stressed parents, whether they are parents of adopted or biological children. However, providing a place for parents to share their concerns and frustrations is different than providing a means for parents to abandon their children in a manner that violates the legal framework designed to protect children.

I urge you to take steps to ensure that illegal acts of “re-homing” have no place on Yahoo. To better understand your company’s approach to combatting illegal acts of “re-homing,” I ask that you provide answers to the following questions by Friday, November 15.

1. Has your company taken any steps to ensure your website is not used to facilitate illegal acts of “re-homing”? If so, what were those steps?
2. In the past two years, has your company discovered, or been made aware of, Yahoo users facilitating illegal “re-homing” arrangements through Yahoo’s website? If so, what was your company’s response?
3. Are violations of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children also violations of Yahoo’s user agreement? Are violations of state child endangerment laws also violations of Yahoo’s user agreement?
4. Does your company have a policy on whether Yahoo users are allowed to use Yahoo to facilitate child placement arrangements that are illegal acts of “re-homing,” or likely to be illegal acts of “re-homing”?

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<sup>2</sup> Interstate Compact on Placement of Children Act, 45 ILCS 15/1 (2013).

Marissa Meyer  
October 28, 2013  
Page 3

Illegal "re-homing" arrangements can place children in grave danger. I appreciate your attention to the role Internet companies can play to ensure these situations are prevented in the future and that children are safe. If you have any questions, please contact Erik Jones, Policy Director and Assistant Attorney General for my office, at (312) 814-3873.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Madigan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "L".

Lisa Madigan