

INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PROTECTING AMERICANS ONLINE

The Issue: Initially meant to safeguard free speech online, the outdated protections in Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 provide immunity from civil liability for online publishers of third-party content. With no accountability for the content published via their platforms, internet intermediaries have free reign to facilitate illegal and dangerous activity online – including the sale of the illicit and counterfeit drugs that now fuels both the spread of COVID-19 fraud and the nation’s opioid crisis.

The Solution: [The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) (ASOP Global) supports targeted Section 230 reform, like the bipartisan *See Something Say Something Online Act* (S. 27), to hold internet platforms accountable for illegal activity online.

The Internet is Flooded with Illegal Online Pharmacies that Put Consumers At Risk

- Of the roughly [35,000 active online pharmacies](#) at any given time, [95%](#) do not comply with applicable laws and pharmacy standards.
- These sites [threaten American lives](#) by selling medicines without a prescription, operating without a license, and peddling fake drugs, often containing dangerous — even deadly — ingredients like paint thinner, fentanyl, mercury, and tar.
- The rampant online sale of illegal and fake medications is fueling both the spread of COVID-19 fraud and the nation’s opioid crisis.

Online Criminals are Exploiting Rising Consumer Demand and the COVID-19 Pandemic for Further Profit

- The COVID-19 pandemic is [accelerating demand](#) for legitimate telemedicine and convenient, lower-cost medications sold online.
- Criminals have rushed to exploit this for profit through an explosion of [new malicious websites](#) – at least 100,000 in March 2020 alone – with the sole purpose of scamming patients with fake COVID-19 cures.
- [Most Americans](#) underestimate the risk of illegal online pharmacies: 37% see little threat in ordering from one, while 7 in 10 Americans incorrectly believe that appearing near the top of search engine results legitimizes such a website.

Targeted Section 230 Reform Will Protect Consumers Online

- Targeted Section 230 reform is needed to drop the shield that enables illegal drug sellers to flourish via online platforms.
- The [See Something Say Something Online Act, introduced by Senators Joe Manchin \(D-WV\) and John Cornyn \(R-TX\)](#), would take action by offering tangible solutions, including:
 - Requiring companies to report suspicious activity to law enforcement, similar to bank requirements on reporting suspicious transactions over \$10,000.
 - Creating an office within the Department of Justice to act as the clearinghouse for these reports, modeled on the Bank Secrecy Act’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network within the Department of the Treasury.
 - Raising the threshold for reporting serious crimes like illegal drug sales, hate crimes, murder, or terrorism to ensure users’ privacy remains safe.
 - Requiring companies to take reasonable steps to prevent and address unlawful activity, holding them liable if they fail to comply.

Please visit ASOP Global’s website for additional information on [Internet Accountability](#).