

COMMITTEE ON  
APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE,  
AND RELATED AGENCIES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS,  
AND RELATED PROGRAMS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY  
COMMITTEE ON  
ETHICS



Grace Meng  
Congress of the United States  
Sixth District, New York

CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC  
AMERICAN CAUCUS  
VICE CHAIR  
APPROPRIATIONS TASK FORCE  
CHAIR  
CONGRESSIONAL KIDS  
SAFETY CAUCUS  
CO-CHAIR  
<http://www.meng.house.gov>  
[www.facebook.com/repgracemeng](http://www.facebook.com/repgracemeng)  
twitter: @repgracemeng

*December 27, 2019*

The Honorable Steven Mnuchin  
Secretary of Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I write with regard to concerning reports of enhanced scrutiny against Arabic words or names used by people of Muslim faith.

Recently, an American Muslim woman used her Venmo account to pay for a meal at a Bangladeshi restaurant named “Al-Aqsa Restaurant.” She was subsequently contacted by Venmo to ask for a full description of the cause of her transaction.

It is my understanding that Venmo’s compliance team flagged this transaction in an attempt to follow Office of Foreign Assets Control’s (OFAC) regulations. However, *al-Aqsa* is not a term associated with terrorist activity; it is a holy site for Muslims around the world. It is also the name of a number of restaurants across the United States, from Salem, OR to Tampa, FL.

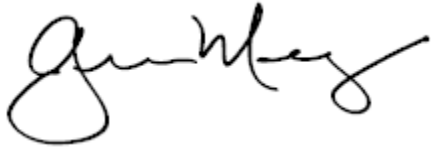
This is part of a larger trend in which banks have closed, without justification, credit and bank accounts of customers perceived as Muslim. For an American Muslim, or anyone, to learn that their account, including identifying personal and financial information, has been flagged to OFAC based on search terms that implicate American Muslims in terrorist activities is unsettling.

I look forward to your response to the following questions:

1. Has OFAC stipulated specific terms that it expects to be flagged by companies like Venmo and Paypal, or do these companies develop their own keyword criteria?
2. Does OFAC encourage companies like Venmo and Paypal to flag phrases associated with white nationalism, like “KKK,” “Nazi,” or “Hitler”?
3. Does OFAC save the personal information associated with flagged accounts if these flagged transactions are found to be unrelated to terrorist activity?

I look forward to your responses in writing, including a classified briefing, if needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grace Meng', with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Grace Meng  
Member of Congress

CC:  
Mr. Dan Schulman  
PayPal  
2211 North First Street  
San Jose, CA 95131