

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

July 31, 2023

The Honorable Lina Khan
Chair
U.S. Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chair Khan:

I am writing to express my serious concerns about the social media giant, TikTok. Given its connections to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the way it collects and controls sensitive personal information, TikTok poses one of the greatest long-term threats to the health, safety, and privacy of millions of Americans.

While almost every company collects various types of data, TikTok's substantial size and the Chinese Communist Party's ability to seize and exploit this data at any time creates the perfect storm for concern.

TikTok is one of the most popular apps in the United States with more than 150 million regular users, or nearly 45 percent of the U.S. population.¹ Ironically, three in five Americans think the app poses a national security threat².

TikTok is built like an indoctrination machine, and its user base is comprised of one of the most impressionable and vulnerable populations: children. The nature of TikTok's application and its content are tailor-made to appeal to younger generations. While some of its content is benign, many users as young as 13 are fed a constant digital diet of content linked to dangerous behaviors like eating disorders and self-harm.³

Every social media company uses algorithms to determine what content is visible to users, but using TikTok comes with particularly serious risks. The company censors topics viewed by the CCP as politically sensitive, denying U.S. citizens access to full information. Even more worrisome, ByteDance employees in China and CCP officials have access to TikTok's data, as we know from multiple whistleblowers.

TikTok has the potential to influence millions of Americans with content that is sympathetic to China. FBI Director Christopher Wray confirmed concerns TikTok could be used to promote the CCP's policy agenda, including anti-Taiwan sentiments. According to Wray, "This is a tool that

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/tiktok-now-150-million-active-users-us-ceo-tell-congress-rcna75607>

² <https://www.businessinsider.com/majority-americans-think-tiktok-threat-national-security-pew-study-2023-7?inline-endstory-related-recommendations=>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/14/business/tiktok-safety-teens-eating-disorders-self-harm.html>

is ultimately within the control of the Chinese government—and...to me, it screams out with national security concerns.”⁴


The app has aggressively censored accounts promoting sentiments counter to the CCP. For example, TikTok suspended the Acton Institute for its support of Hong Kong democracy advocate Jimmy Lai,⁵ who is now a political prisoner and facing trial on bogus charges. TikTok also banned the account of the former NBA player and regular CCP critic, Enes Kanter Freedom. Kanter’s account was only reinstated the day TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew testified to lawmakers that Americans’ TikTok feeds were immune from Chinese censorship.⁶

To ensure the administration is actively seeking to safeguard the data of Americans and protect our kids and grandkids, please provide answers to the follow question to my office by no later than October 30, 2023.

1. How is the FTC protecting data of those under the age of 18?
2. How will the FTC prevent apps like TikTok from using consumer data to target youth with dangerous content encouraging eating disorders and self-harm?
3. What investigations, if any, is the FTC launching into TikTok?
4. How is the FTC working with the private sector and other branches of the federal government to better protect consumer data from international threats?
5. What guardrails are the FTC putting in place to prohibit the development of algorithms that directly promote CCP propaganda? How does the FTC intend to track this and inform Congress of its findings?
6. Is the FTC investigating any other apps owned by ByteDance, such as Lemon8 or others?

I look forward to your prompt response to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,



Senator James E. Risch
United States Senator

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/technology/fbi-chief-says-tiktok-screams-us-national-security-concerns-2023-03-08/>

⁵ <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/tiktok-suspends-libertarian-think-tank-that-posted-about-hong-kong-and-jimmy-lai/>

⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/03/24/enes-kanter-freedom-nba-tiktok-ban/>