

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 3, 2023

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230

Dear Mr. Chew:

We write regarding reports that TikTok has recently hired several high-level executives from its Chinese parent company ByteDance, further calling into question the independence of TikTok's operations and the security of its U.S. users' information.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that “[s]ince the start of the year, a string of high-level executives have transferred from ByteDance to TikTok,” moving from China to the U.S., including after the departure of U.S. executives.¹ The former ByteDance executives have reportedly assumed influential roles overseeing TikTok's “advertising business, human resources, monetization, business marketing and products related to advertising and e-commerce initiatives” and have brought their own staff from Beijing.² These changes were alarming enough that employees raised concerns about the lack of a true separation from ByteDance — reportedly joking that TikTok is solving its ByteDance problem by moving ByteDance to the U.S.

The relationship between ByteDance and TikTok poses a unique risk to the security and privacy of TikTok's users in the United States. TikTok executives, including personnel based in China, have been found spying on American journalists, and, in leaked recordings, its staff acknowledged that “everything is seen in China.”³ As the intelligence community has repeatedly warned, Chinese national security laws provide the Chinese government significant legal control

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/tech/tiktok-employees-say-executive-moves-to-u-s-show-china-parents-influence-ef5ff21f>

² *Id.*

³ “EXCLUSIVE: TikTok Spied On Forbes Journalists.” Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybakerwhite/2022/12/22/tiktok-tracks-forbes-journalists-bytedance/>
“Leaked Audio From 80 Internal TikTok Meetings Shows That US User Data Has Been Repeatedly Accessed From China.” BuzzFeed. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emilybakerwhite/tiktok-tapes-us-user-data-chinabytedance-access>

over any data within the reach of Chinese companies, thereby putting any data held by ByteDance in the reach of the Chinese government.⁴

In response to these widespread concerns, TikTok has repeatedly made commitments and representations to the American public about the independent management of TikTok's operations, the limited role of ByteDance, and the security of U.S. users' information. You have attempted to distance TikTok from ByteDance and promised a separation that "amounts to a firewall that seals off protected US user data from unauthorized foreign access," with "American data stored on American soil by an American company, overseen by American personnel."⁵

However, the recent move of many ByteDance executives to the U.S. seemingly undermines this assertion to Congress and the public. The personnel changes give the impression that TikTok is attempting to preserve ByteDance's influence over TikTok while avoiding suspicion. Once again, TikTok's actions appear to align with a pattern of misleading actions and broken commitments regarding serious matters related to users' safety and national security, which we noted in a previous letter to you.⁶

We are concerned these personnel changes undermine the security of U.S. data and the representations TikTok has made about its independence from ByteDance. As such, please fully answer the following questions by October 13:

1. Prior to December 31, 2022, how many employees were hired by TikTok who had previously worked at ByteDance?
2. Since January 1, 2023, how many employees have been hired by TikTok who previously worked at ByteDance?
3. Please identify the roles of all current TikTok employees who previously worked at ByteDance?
4. Were these personnel changes disclosed to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States prior to the report in the *Wall Street Journal*?
5. What security protocols are you imposing on ByteDance employees that transfer from China to the U.S.?
6. Are there any rules, restrictions, or controls on communications between TikTok employees who were previously employed at ByteDance and personnel based in China?
7. How does TikTok supervise or oversee communications between its employees who were previously employed at ByteDance and personnel based in China?

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https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/FINAL_NCSC_SOF_Bulletin_PRC_Laws.pdf

⁵ <https://techpolicy.press/transcript-tiktok-ceo-testifies-to-congress/>

⁶ <https://www.blackburn.senate.gov/2023/6/icymi-tiktok-confirms-to-blackburn-and-blumenthal-that-some-u-s-user-data-is-stored-in-china>

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator