

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 19, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok Inc.
Culver City, CA 90230

Mr. Adam Presser
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC
Culver City, CA 90230

Mr. Chew and Mr. Presser:

We write regarding disgusting new reports that TikTok knowingly withheld a critical safety measure for millions of American users—including children—in order to determine whether protecting users would impact its financial bottom-line. These revelations raise serious questions about TikTok’s repeated assurances to Congress, parents, and the American public that it prioritizes the safety and well-being of young people over profit.

According to reports, TikTok developed changes to its recommendation algorithm intended to prevent users from being repeatedly and intentionally exposed to potentially harmful content, including videos concerning sadness, loneliness, extreme dieting, and other sensitive subjects. In December 2021, TikTok publicly announced that it was testing ways to avoid recommending clusters of similar content that could be harmful when viewed repeatedly. TikTok did not disclose, however, its depraved decision to intentionally withhold these protections from approximately 10 percent of its U.S. users—a control group that reportedly represented approximately 15 million Americans at the time. While testing for effectiveness is common practice, disturbingly TikTok appeared fixated on whether the safety measure would affect user engagement or the “stickiness” of the platform—trying to put the price tag on safety. Even more troubling, this control group, presumably intentionally, included minors.¹

One of those minors was 16-year-old Chase Nasca. According to an internal TikTok report, Chase was placed into a “backtest” experiment in January 2022, meaning that TikTok’s “filter bubble prevention strategies did not take effect on this user *by design*.”² In the weeks that followed, TikTok reportedly recommended Chase thousands of videos involving themes of sadness, hopelessness, loneliness, suicide, and self-harm. Chase died by suicide in February 2022. TikTok’s own internal review reportedly examined the 7,563 videos Chase viewed during the final two weeks of his life and found that 73 percent contained themes such as sadness or personal struggles,

¹ Olivia Carville, *TikTok Withheld a Safety Feature from Millions. One Died by Suicide.*, BLOOMBERG (Aug. 4, 2026), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-08-04/confidential-tiktok-report-shows-algorithm-safety-feature-withheld-from-millions>.

² *Id.*

while nearly 10 percent violated TikTok’s own policies.³ TikTok intentionally withheld from Chase the exact safety protections that were developed to interrupt *precisely* this deluge of abuse.

These revelations are appalling, but they are made even more sinister because TikTok was on notice about the effects of its recommendation algorithms on children. In 2021, we spearheaded a series of hearings examining the repeated failures of social media companies to protect children online. On October 26, 2021, our Subcommittee on Consumer Protection convened a hearing at which TikTok testified before Congress about the safety of its platform. At that time, we raised concerns that social media platforms were prioritizing engagement and profit over the safety of children and that recommendation algorithms could drive young users into increasingly extreme and harmful content.⁴ Those concerns were not hypothetical.

At the hearing, we discussed reports of children being pulled into algorithmic “rabbit holes” involving extreme dieting, eating disorders, and other harmful material. TikTok was *directly* confronted with evidence about the precise danger at issue here: recommendation systems repeatedly serving harmful content to children. At the time, we requested documents from TikTok about its research and data on teenage mental health issues—in response, TikTok sent the Subcommittee screenshots of its website and publicly-available third-party reports. Yet just months later, your company nevertheless decided that millions of users could be denied an available safety protection in order to measure the effect that protection would have on engagement.

These latest revelations appear to be part of a troubling pattern. In October 2024, following disclosures in litigation brought by the Kentucky Attorney General, we again wrote to you regarding evidence that TikTok was aware of substantial harms its platform posed to children and teens while publicly promoting purported safety measures.⁵ Those disclosures indicated that TikTok executives knew certain safety tools were ineffective, yet viewed them as useful talking points in response to concerns from policymakers and the public. Now, these latest disclosures show that TikTok not only possessed information about the dangers created by its recommendation systems, but deliberately denied millions of users access to a safety intervention so that the company could study the intervention’s impact on engagement.

Congress has made clear that this status quo is unacceptable. On August 5th, the Senate Commerce Committee unanimously advanced our bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA). When signed into law, KOSA will address exactly the kind of conduct these disclosures raise: platforms designing products and algorithms to maximize addiction while children bear the consequences. The reported decision to intentionally withhold an available safety intervention from minors underscores why voluntary promises from companies like TikTok are insufficient and why meaningful transparency and accountability are necessary.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Protecting Kids Online: Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Consumer Prot., Prod. Safety & Data Sec. of the S. Comm. on Com., Sci. & Transp.*, 117th Cong. (2021).

⁵ Letter from Marsha Blackburn, U.S. Sen., & Richard Blumenthal, U.S. Sen., to Shou Zi Chew, Chief Exec. Officer, TikTok Inc. (Oct. 11, 2024), <https://www.blackburn.senate.gov/services/files/8E7A1E77-7F04-4F0B-8BB4-63A645413E3A>.

Accordingly, please provide complete responses to the following questions and requests no later than September 1, 2026:

1. Describe in detail the experiment or experiments involving TikTok’s “filter bubble prevention strategies” or any other research on the mental health impacts of its recommendation algorithm, including:
 - a. the date each experiment began and ended;
 - b. the purpose and design of each experiment;
 - c. the number and percentage of U.S. users assigned to each treatment and control group;
 - d. the number and percentage of minors assigned to each group, broken down by age;
 - e. the criteria used to select users for each group; and
 - f. every metric TikTok used to evaluate the experiment, including watch time, session length, retention, daily active use, return rate, advertising revenue, and any other engagement or revenue metric.
2. Has TikTok ever declined to implement a safety feature or made significant changes to a proposed feature after finding that the feature could impact engagement or other metrics of user and advertising growth?
3. At the time of the Senate Commerce Committee’s October 26, 2021 hearing:
 - a. had TikTok developed or begun developing the filter-bubble prevention strategies described in recent reporting;
 - b. was TikTok considering testing those protections by withholding them from a control group; and
 - c. did TikTok contemplate including minors in such a control group?
4. Identify every employee or executive who approved, reviewed, recommended, or was informed of the decision to withhold TikTok’s filter-bubble or repetitive-content protections from a subset of U.S. users. For each individual, state his or her title and role in the decision.
5. Explain why TikTok permitted minors to be placed in a control group that did not receive a safety intervention designed to reduce repetitive exposure to potentially harmful content. Did TikTok consider excluding minors from the control group?
6. Before beginning the experiment, did TikTok conduct any risk assessment concerning the possibility that withholding these protections could expose users—particularly minors—to increased recommendations concerning suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, depression, loneliness, or other potentially harmful subjects? If so, provide all such assessments. If not, explain why not.
7. At the time TikTok initiated the experiment, what evidence did TikTok possess indicating that repeated exposure to content involving sadness, loneliness, suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, extreme dieting, or similar subjects could harm users or minors?
8. Provide the complete, unredacted version of the March 2023 internal report, including all drafts, appendices, underlying data, and communications concerning its preparation, findings, recommendations, circulation, or discussion.

9. What did TikTok's experiment determine about the effectiveness of its filter-bubble prevention strategies in reducing exposure to potentially harmful repetitive content? Provide the complete results of the experiment, including any differences between the treatment and control groups.
10. Since January 1, 2019, identify every experiment in the United States in which TikTok withheld, disabled, delayed, or reduced a safety feature, content protection, recommendation safeguard, parental control, privacy protection, or other user-protection measure from a control group.
11. How many U.S. TikTok users have, since January 1, 2021, been placed in an experiment in which a safety protection available to other users was intentionally withheld? Provide the total number and the number of affected minors.
12. When did you personally first learn that TikTok had conducted experiments in which its filter-bubble prevention or repetitive-content safety measures were withheld from U.S. users? When did you first learn that minors had been included in such experiments?
13. Does TikTok currently permit any experiment involving U.S. minors in which a safety feature, protection, mitigation, or more protective product setting is intentionally withheld in order to measure its effect on engagement, retention, revenue, or another business metric? If so, identify each such experiment.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator