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**STATE OF WASHINGTON  
KING COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT**

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Plaintiff,

v.

TIKTOK INC.; TIKTOK LLC;  
TIKTOK PTE. LTD.; TIKTOK LTD.;  
BYTEDANCE INC.; AND  
BYTEDANCE LTD.,

Defendants.

NO.

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE  
AND OTHER RELIEF

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1  
2 1. For years, TikTok, Inc., along with its parent and affiliate entities named as  
3 Defendants in this action (collectively, “Defendants” or “TikTok”), has misled the public about  
4 the risks its social media platform (“Platform”) poses to users in a deceptive scheme to maximize  
5 its own profits. American children and teenagers are in the grip of a mental health crisis driven  
6 by excessive social media use.<sup>1</sup> TikTok has contributed to the crisis by targeting kids to get them  
7 hooked and ensure a lifetime of revenue, designing its Platform with elements that prey upon  
8 young people’s unique psychological vulnerabilities and drive young people to spend excessive  
9 amounts of time on TikTok’s Platform. And it worked. TikTok operates one of the most widely  
10 used social media platforms among U.S. teens.

11 2. TikTok’s business model depends on maximizing advertising revenue, which in  
12 turn depends on keeping users on its Platform for as long as possible to show ads and collect  
13 user data to sell yet more targeted ads. To achieve that goal, TikTok employs an arsenal of  
14 harmful addictive-by-design features specifically tailored to exploit, manipulate, and capitalize  
15 from young users’ developing brains. At the same time, rather than making its product safe or  
16 disclosing its Platform’s harms, TikTok misleads the public and conceals the ways its Platform  
17 has harmed—and is continuing to harm—children and teens.

18 3. TikTok has internally known for years that excessive, compulsive, and addictive  
19 use of its Platform is harmful to children and teenagers. Outside the United States, TikTok’s  
20 parent company Defendant ByteDance Ltd. actively strives to protect young users from those  
21 harms by, for example, providing a different version of TikTok that reduces harm to young users.  
22 TikTok has every ability to take similar measures to protect young users across the United States.

23 4. But it chooses not to. In the United States, TikTok specifically targets  
24 children (under 13 years old) and teenagers (aged 13 to 17) with an algorithm and Platform

25  
26 

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<sup>1</sup> See Office of the Surgeon General, *Social Media and Youth Mental Health, The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory*, U.S. Dep’t of Health & Human Servs. (May 23, 2023), <https://archive.ph/QAytZ>.

1 features designed to keep these young users (users under 18) on its Platform as long as possible.

2 TikTok’s executives and employees admit that they target young Americans, stating:

3 a. “It’s better to have young people as an early adopter, especially the teenagers in  
4 the U.S. Why? They [*sic*] got a lot of time.”<sup>2</sup>

5 b. “Teenagers in the U.S. are a golden audience . . . If you look at China, the teenage  
6 culture doesn’t exist—the teens are super busy in school studying for tests, so  
7 they don’t have the time and luxury to play social media apps.”<sup>3</sup>

8 5. TikTok knows that the harmful effects of its Platform wreak havoc on the mental  
9 health of millions of American children and teenagers. Its executives admit:

- 10 a. [REDACTED]
- 11 b. [REDACTED]
- 12 [REDACTED]
- 13 [REDACTED]
- 14 [REDACTED]

15 6. Despite its full knowledge of the potential for serious harm, including sleep  
16 deprivation, depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide, and death, TikTok deliberately and  
17 successfully targets its product to young users as its core demographic. As a result, young  
18 American users utilize the TikTok Platform at extremely high rates and suffer because of it.

19 7. TikTok deceptively markets its Platform to conceal its harmful effects. It lures  
20 children and teenagers with misrepresentations about its Platform, fails to disclose material  
21 information about the harms that result from using its Platform, and induces excessive,  
22 compulsive, and addictive use of its Platform. To convince children and teenagers to use  
23 TikTok—and their parents to allow them to do so—TikTok tells the world that its Platform is  
24

25 <sup>2</sup> See Andrew Brown, *Musical.ly’s Alex Zhu on Igniting Viral Growth and Building a User Community*  
26 *2016*, YouTube (Feb. 17, 2022), <https://archive.ph/wTx62>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Mozur, *Chinese Tech Firms Forced to Choose Market: Home or Everywhere Else*, N.Y. Times  
(Aug. 9, 2016), <https://archive.ph/xZNRp>.

1 safe, fun, and appropriate for teens and children. But TikTok knows that its Platform is harmful  
2 and addictive. TikTok also knows that once on the Platform, many kids fall into a harmful,  
3 pervasive cycle of compulsive use.

4 8. TikTok does not tell users or their parents that it [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]. Nor does TikTok  
7 disclose [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED] and that it [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]

12 9. In response to criticism from users, parents, the public, and politicians, TikTok  
13 recently implemented certain tools that it claims help users reduce the time they spend on the  
14 Platform and other harms caused by TikTok's recommendation system or algorithm. But  
15 TikTok's representations regarding these tools are misleading because TikTok knows that [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED].

19 10. TikTok refuses to make meaningful changes if there is any chance the changes  
20 will reduce its profits, even if only incrementally. All the while, TikTok has trumpeted its false  
21 mantra that users' safety is its top priority.

22 11. In addition to being deceptive, TikTok's conduct in targeting children and  
23 teenagers with a harmful and addictive product by capitalizing on their developing brains and  
24 subverting their autonomy is an unfair business practice under the Washington Consumer  
25 Protection Act (CPA).  
26



1 19. Defendant ByteDance Ltd. is the ultimate parent company of all other  
2 Defendants. It is a company incorporated in the Cayman Islands with its principal place of  
3 business in Beijing, China.

4 20. The defendants identified in Paragraphs 14 through 19 above are referred to  
5 collectively in this Complaint as “Defendants” or “TikTok.”

### 6 III. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

7 21. The State files this Complaint and institutes these proceedings under the  
8 provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86. The Attorney General has the authority  
9 to commence this action as conferred by RCW 19.86.080 and RCW 19.86.140.

10 22. Defendant TikTok Inc. is registered as a foreign profit corporation in the state of  
11 Washington and maintains a registered agent in Washington: Corporation Service Company,  
12 300 Deschutes Way SW, Ste 208, MC-CSC1, Tumwater, WA 98501. As such, Defendant is  
13 subject to service of process, notice, or demand under Washington law. RCW 23.95.450.

14 23. Defendant ByteDance Inc. is registered as a foreign profit corporation in the  
15 State of Washington and maintains a registered agent in Washington: Corporation Service  
16 Company, 300 Deschutes Way SW, Ste 208, MC-CSC1, Tumwater, WA 98501. As such,  
17 Defendant is subject to service of process, notice, or demand under Washington law.  
18 RCW 23.95.450.

19 24. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendants pursuant to RCW 4.28.180,  
20 RCW 4.28.185, and RCW 19.86.160 because Defendants have engaged in the conduct set forth  
21 in this Complaint in King County and elsewhere in the State of Washington. TikTok maintains  
22 office locations in Seattle and Bellevue, markets its services throughout Washington, employs  
23 Washington residents in Washington, works with Washington businesses and individuals,  
24 advertises to Washington residents including residents under the age of 18, and intentionally  
25 avails itself of the Washington market so as to render the exercise of jurisdiction over TikTok  
26 consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.



1 31. Shortly thereafter in February 2019, TikTok paid the FTC \$5.7 million to settle  
2 allegations that Musical.ly violated COPPA by illegally collecting and using personal  
3 information from children without parental consent.

4 32. The FTC had alleged that Musical.ly did not require users to enter their age when  
5 creating an account, Musical.ly never requested age information for existing users who created  
6 accounts prior to July 2017, and “[a] significant percentage of Musical.ly users [were] children  
7 under 13, and numerous press articles between 2016 and 2018 highlight the popularity of the  
8 App among tweens and younger children.”

9 33. Those COPPA violations fueled TikTok’s growth and immense popularity  
10 because the lack of effective age verification made it easier for children under 13 to sign up and  
11 consume content. Additionally, those same users gave TikTok more posts to engage existing  
12 users and attract new users to the Platform.

13 34. After settling with the FTC, TikTok bifurcated its Platform into [REDACTED]  
14 (intended for use by children who report their age as under 13) and what TikTok called the [REDACTED]  
15 or [REDACTED] (the standard version of TikTok, available to everyone who reports their  
16 age as 13 or older). [REDACTED] is a TikTok experience for [REDACTED] featuring [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 as well as other restrictions. TikTok collects personal data from users in both experiences.

19 35. TikTok remains highly incentivized to keep young people on the Platform. An  
20 internal review [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED] According to internal data from 2019, [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED].  
23 One TikTok 2019 internal presentation states [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]. TikTok considers users under age 13 a critical  
25 demographic, believing users will continue to use the Platform to which they are accustomed  
26 [REDACTED]

1           36. With a relentless focus on young people, TikTok’s growth in the United States  
2 exploded. Through at least 2020, the Platform’s ██████████ in the United States was ██████████  
3 ██████████.

4           37. TikTok’s internal data ██████████  
5 ██████████:



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17           38. In 2023, 63% of all Americans aged 13 to 17 who responded to a Pew Research  
18 survey reported using TikTok, and most teenagers in the U.S. were using TikTok daily; 17% of  
19 American teens said that they were on TikTok “almost constantly.”<sup>4</sup>

20           39. For Washingtonian youth, by December 2023 at least ██████████  
21 ██████████. This represents ██████████ of the population of  
22 Washington youth within the broader age range of 10 to 19. In terms of the intensity of their use  
23 of the Platform, by December 2023 at least ██████████ Washingtonian teenagers aged 13 to 17 used  
24 TikTok monthly while at least ██████████ Washingtonian teenagers aged 13 to 17 used TikTok daily.

25  
26           <sup>4</sup> See Monica Anderson, et al., *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023*, Pew Research Ctr. (Dec. 11, 2023), <https://archive.ph/LwGpW>.

1 40. As they age, Washington users become more valuable to TikTok. TikTok [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED].  
3 From March 2022 to July 2023, Washington users netted TikTok an average of [REDACTED], [REDACTED],  
4 [REDACTED], [REDACTED] respectively.

5 **B. The Work TikTok Does in Washington Is Important to TikTok's Business Model**

6 41. TikTok's Washington employees work to understand its youth market and youth  
7 safety. For example, TikTok's Seattle office has safety employees and current job postings for  
8 its Trust and Safety department. [REDACTED].

9 42. TikTok identifies Washington as a [REDACTED] for [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]

11 43. TikTok has hosted teen forums in Washington to discuss how teens could be safe  
12 and responsible online. TikTok has also partnered with local Washington based PTAs to host  
13 coordinated local events.

14 44. Similarly, TikTok is a multi-year supporter of 'Safer Internet Day' in Seattle and  
15 five other US cities with a goal of maximizing online well-being.

16 **C. All Defendants Jointly Operate TikTok**

17 45. Defendants are interconnected companies all intimately involved in operating the  
18 TikTok Platform.

19 46. At the corporate level, Defendant ByteDance Ltd. is the parent and owner of  
20 Defendants ByteDance, Inc. and TikTok Ltd. TikTok Ltd. owns Defendants TikTok LLC and  
21 TikTok Pte. Ltd. TikTok LLC in turn owns Defendant TikTok Inc.

22 47. ByteDance Ltd. and TikTok Ltd. make decisions about the TikTok Platform, even  
23 though the TikTok Platform is unavailable in China. [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]

25 48. At the executive level, although TikTok Inc. is incorporated in the United States,  
26 it is led by an executive team based in the United States, Singapore, and China. A group of

1 ByteDance Ltd. and TikTok Inc. executives, including Zhang Yiming, Liang Rubo,  
2 Zhao Penyuan, and Zhu Wenjia, direct and control TikTok’s core features and development.

3 49. At the employee level, employee roles among Defendants are often blurred:  
4 TikTok Inc. represents it has not created or maintained an organizational chart because its  
5 employees do not have formal titles and their responsibilities between organizations are fluid.  
6 Some former employees have even stated they were unsure which Defendant they actually  
7 worked for.

8 50. Because Defendants’ corporate boundaries are porous, employees at all the  
9 companies work together. All Defendants’ employees use a shared internal messaging system,  
10 Lark, where they can engage in chats and group chats with each other regardless of their formal  
11 company affiliation. Defendants’ employees use Lark to discuss specific features on TikTok.  
12 TikTok CEO Shou Chew confirmed to Congress on March 23, 2023, that employees of  
13 ByteDance Ltd. work on the TikTok Platform and that he personally uses Lark to communicate  
14 “with employees at ByteDance [Ltd.]”<sup>5</sup>

15 51. According to a 2023 report prepared for the Australian Select Committee on  
16 Foreign Interference through Social Media, one ByteDance Ltd. insider has described TikTok  
17 Inc. as “not developed enough to be a self-contained business unit. Therefore . . . TikTok draws  
18 on personnel, experience, and methods of ByteDance’s Douyin app, software, and commercial  
19 model to achieve ‘technology accumulation and business breakthroughs.’”<sup>6</sup>

20 52. This report also gives examples of cross-hiring among Defendants. For example,  
21 in November 2022, TikTok Inc. posted a job for a “data scientist” based in Shanghai. The next  
22 week, ByteDance Ltd. posted a job advertisement with the same description. The hiring team for  
23 the ByteDance Ltd. position worked for “TikTok.”

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24  
25 <sup>5</sup> *TikTok: How Congress Can Safeguard American Data Privacy and Protect Children from Online Harms*  
26 *Before H. Comm. on Energy and Commerce*, 118th Cong. 28, 36, 96 (2023).

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Lee, et al., *TikTok, ByteDance, and Their Ties to the Chinese Communist Party*, 42 (March 14, 2023), <https://t.co/ROPtMMud89>.

1           53.     The report concluded that ByteDance Ltd. management considers the entities  
2 interchangeable.

3           54.     The report is not alone in considering the entities a single, combined organization.  
4 Prominent leaders of TikTok Inc. even state on their public LinkedIn profiles that they are  
5 employed by “ByteDance/TikTok.”

6           55.     Indeed, in April 2021, when Shou Chew was named CEO of TikTok Inc., he was  
7 serving as CFO of ByteDance Ltd. As CEO of TikTok Inc., Chew reports to the CEO of  
8 ByteDance Ltd and is also paid by ByteDance Ltd.

9           56.     [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED].

11           57.     Moreover, this organizational and employee interchangeability is confirmed by  
12 shared business projects, models, and operations.

13           58.     Defendants operate on a “shared services” model in which ByteDance Ltd.  
14 provides legal, safety, and privacy resources, including personnel, for other Defendants.

15           59.     As part of Defendants’ shared services model, ByteDance Ltd. controls legal  
16 compliance and oversight at TikTok Inc. ByteDance Ltd.’s Global General Counsel, who reports  
17 to ByteDance Ltd.’s CEO, also oversees TikTok Inc.’s legal issues.

18           60.     Similarly, ByteDance Ltd. controls TikTok Inc.’s e-commerce operations, and  
19 leadership of TikTok Inc.’s e-commerce operations reports directly to ByteDance Ltd.’s  
20 executives rather than TikTok Inc.’s own CEO. Further, TikTok Inc.’s head of human resources  
21 reports to ByteDance Ltd.’s head of human resources.

22           61.     Additionally, upon information and belief, Defendants have one centralized bank  
23 account for ByteDance Ltd.’s more than a dozen products, including the TikTok Platform.

24           62.     ByteDance Ltd. also created the TikTok algorithm and maintains ownership over  
25 it.  
26

1           63. Further, TikTok Ltd. is listed as the TikTok Platform's developer, and  
2 TikTok Pte. Ltd. as the TikTok Platform's seller, on the Apple App Store. Similarly, the TikTok  
3 Platform's listing on Google Play provides TikTok Pte. Ltd. as the entity responsible for the app.

4           64. Finally, the tiktok.com domain is also registered to TikTok Ltd.

5           65. In sum, upon information and belief, at all relevant times:

- 6           i. Each Defendant has actively formulated, participated in, approved, directed,  
7           or otherwise controlled the acts or practices referenced throughout this  
8           complaint.
- 9           ii. Each Defendant acted individually and jointly with every other named  
10           Defendant in committing all acts alleged in this Complaint.
- 11           iii. Each Defendant acted: (a) as a principal; (b) under express or implied agency;  
12           and/or (c) with actual or ostensible authority to perform the acts alleged in  
13           this Complaint on behalf of every other named Defendant.
- 14           iv. Some or all Defendants acted as the agent of the others, and all Defendants  
15           acted within the scope of their agency if acting as an agent of another.
- 16           v. Each Defendant knew or realized, or should have known or realized, that the  
17           other Defendants were engaging in or planned to engage in the violations of  
18           law alleged in this Complaint. Knowing or realizing that the other Defendants  
19           were engaging in such unlawful conduct, each Defendant nevertheless  
20           facilitated the commission of those unlawful acts. Each Defendant intended  
21           to and did encourage, facilitate, or assist in the commission of the unlawful  
22           acts, and thereby aided and abetted the other Defendants in the unlawful  
23           conduct.
- 24           vi. Defendants have engaged in a conspiracy, common enterprise, and common  
25           course of conduct, the purpose of which is and was to engage in the violations  
26

1 of law alleged in this Complaint. The conspiracy, common enterprise, and  
2 common course of conduct continue to the present.

3 **D. TikTok’s Platform Features Hook and Harm Young Users**

4 66. To drive growth and revenue in the United States, TikTok strategically designs  
5 and deploys exploitative and manipulative features to addict young users and maximize their  
6 time on its Platform. This is not an accidental byproduct of its efforts to grow its base of young  
7 users and increase its advertising revenues. Rather, addicting young users to its Platform is a  
8 central pillar in its growth strategy—and one that TikTok has doggedly pursued notwithstanding  
9 the likelihood of harm caused to those young users.

10 67. TikTok intentionally designed its Platform to capture as much of its users’ time  
11 and attention as possible, and admits that [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED] The more time users spend on the Platform, the more  
13 ads they watch, which increases TikTok’s ad revenue. TikTok has long prioritized maximizing  
14 the amount of time that teenagers spend on its Platform.

15 68. TikTok’s targeted focus on increasing young users’ time on its Platform is no  
16 accident: internal TikTok documents note that [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED] and  
18 that [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]  
20 69. TikTok conducts [REDACTED]. It found that [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED].

23 70. TikTok optimizes its Platform for maximum use by young people. It tracks  
24 metrics to measure its success, such as: [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]. TikTok uses this data in [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED].

3 71. TikTok also targets American children under the age of thirteen with its  
4 “Kids Mode” version of the Platform.

5 72. [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]

9 73. [REDACTED] TikTok expressly stated that [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED].

12 74. TikTok’s efforts to maximize usage of its Platform by American teenagers and  
13 children have been extremely successful. The TikTok app is now American teens’ “primary  
14 social app of choice.”<sup>7</sup>

15 **1. TikTok designed its Platform to promote compulsive use**

16 75. TikTok created Platform features to cause increased, excessive, compulsive, and  
17 addictive use, despite knowing that young people are more susceptible to—and impacted  
18 by—those features. For young users of the TikTok Platform, these impacts are severe, and  
19 include such things as increased levels of depression and anxiety disorders, reduced sleep,  
20 self-harm, suicidal ideation, and eating disorders.

21 76. TikTok’s algorithms and design decisions are intended to cause young users to  
22 compulsively spend increasing amounts of time on the Platform. TikTok outfitted the Platform  
23 with features that its own employees describe as [REDACTED] particularly effective  
24

25 \_\_\_\_\_  
26 <sup>7</sup> See Andrew Hutchinson, *New Survey Underlines TikTok’s Popularity with Teen Users*, Soc. Med. Today (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://archive.ph/gzD1P>.

1 at enticing younger users, who TikTok employees admit, [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]  
3 77. TikTok’s design choices exploit the neurotransmitter dopamine, which helps  
4 humans feel pleasure as part of the brain’s reward system to encourage reinforcement. Dopamine  
5 “rewards” can lead to addictive behavior, particularly when rewards are unpredictable.

6 78. Unpredictably delivered dopamine hits, known as “variable rewards,” are  
7 particularly effective at influencing human behavior. A report about persuasive design called  
8 *Disrupted Childhood* [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]  
10 explained how variable rewards produce dopamine rushes:

11 Variable rewards hold a special thrill, as the user anticipates a reward  
12 that they know could come but is tantalisingly just out of reach. A  
13 gambler waiting to see where the roulette wheel will stop or a viewer  
14 watching a presenter’s dramatic pause before they announce a  
15 winner. In both cases, the individuals experience a dopamine rush as  
16 they anticipate the unknown outcome.<sup>8</sup>

17 79. The anticipation of the reward, not just the reward itself, drives compulsive and  
18 unhealthy habit formation. TikTok knows that “[o]nce the reward has been absorbed, the  
19 dopamine fades leaving the desire for more.”

20 80. TikTok successfully harnesses this well-researched method to fuel excessive,  
21 compulsive, and addictive use of its Platform while knowing that the prospect of an  
22 *unpredictable* dopamine “reward” is even more addicting than consistent dopamine “rewards.”

23 81. To that end, the Platform deploys variable rewards to its users. Some of the  
24 features that deliver these variable rewards, such as push notifications and the recommendation  
25 system, are described below. Young users of the Platform find it [REDACTED]

26 <sup>8</sup> See Baroness Kidron, et al., *Disrupted Childhood: The Cost of Persuasive Design*, 20 (June 2018).

1 82. TikTok knows that minors are particularly susceptible to compulsive use of its  
2 Platform. A TikTok-commissioned report corroborates that young developing brains are  
3 vulnerable to harmful addictive behaviors:

4 [I]f adapting to physical changes poses a new set of challenges to the  
5 developing young person, the rapid development of the brain brings  
6 additional and perhaps greater ones. In healthy development, the  
7 Limbic system of the brain (which regulates emotion and feelings of  
8 reward) undergoes dramatic changes between [the] ages of  
9 10-12 years. These changes then interact with the pre-frontal cortex  
10 of the brain (the judgement centres) to promote novelty seeking  
11 behaviour, risk-taking and interactions with peers. In simple terms,  
12 this means there is a phase of intense emotion, whilst judgment can  
13 appear to be less acute, as those ‘judgement centres’ of the brain are  
14 being revised . . . [UNICEF] describes early adolescence as a time of  
15 rapid learning and brain development, which facilitates increases in  
16 sensation-seeking, motivation for social relations and sensitivity to  
17 social evaluation[.]<sup>9</sup>

13 83. As the *Disrupted Childhood* report found, “[c]hildren’s predilection to seek  
14 immediate gratification makes them particularly susceptible to habit-forming rewards”<sup>10</sup>—a  
15 susceptibility that TikTok exploits for greater profits.

16 84. The unpredictable “rewards” that the TikTok Platform provides—such as “Likes”  
17 (received when a user clicks a heart-shaped button on a video); “follows” (a user’s decision to  
18 “follow” another user’s account); and “comments” (user comments to posts on the  
19 Platform)—are social rewards. [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED] TikTok leverages this  
21 sensitivity and doles out social rewards to keep young users on its Platform for longer periods  
22 of time.

23  
24 \_\_\_\_\_  
25 <sup>9</sup> Zoe Hilton, et al., *Exploring effective prevention education responses to dangerous online challenges*,  
26 (Praesidio Safeguarding, November 2021), <https://praesidiosafeguarding.co.uk/safeguarding/uploads/2021/11/Exploring-effective-prevention-education-responses-to-dangerous-online-challenges-English-UK-compressed-1.pdf>, (last visited on July 17, 2024)

<sup>10</sup> See Kidron, *supra* note 8, at 20.

1 85. Minors are susceptible to becoming addicted to the TikTok Platform because  
2 younger brains have not had as much time to develop as those of adults. TikTok takes advantage  
3 of this vulnerability, [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED] And creating this addiction is TikTok’s intent. Internal presentations note that [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. One of TikTok’s internal  
8 goals in 2020 was to [REDACTED].

9 a. **TikTok’s “recommendation system” encourages compulsive use by**  
10 **recommending an endless stream of content**

11 86. The central feature of the TikTok Platform is its [REDACTED]  
12 which is a series of algorithms that powers the [REDACTED] The For You feed provides users  
13 with a stream of videos that TikTok’s recommendation system predicts will keep them on the  
14 Platform. And it works. One internal document [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED] notes, [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]

17 87. TikTok represents that videos on a user’s For You page are “likely to be of  
18 interest to that particular user” and that “each person’s feed is unique and tailored to that specific  
19 individual.” TikTok’s recommendation system is, in large part, composed of the following: [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED].  
24 [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 88. TikTok’s recommendation system is content neutral or, in TikTok’s own words,

4 [REDACTED]. As described in an internal TikTok document, [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED].

6 [REDACTED] Another internal document, a screenshot of which is below, clearly

7 indicates that [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]. The recommendation system

9 learns from how users respond to what they view on the Platform— [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]—and based on that feedback delivers more

11 videos intended to keep users on the Platform for longer periods. The engineers who designed

12 and implemented the recommendation system programmed it to maximize time spent on TikTok,

13 so that the system pushes videos intended to keep users on the TikTok Platform longer than they

14 would otherwise choose.



1 89. The recommendation system accomplishes this in part through the deployment of  
2 intermittent variable rewards. [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED].

4 90. TikTok employees, including those working on the recommendation system,  
5 understand that the three greatest measures of the company’s success are: (1) attracting users,  
6 (2) retaining users, and (3) keeping them on the Platform for longer and longer. [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]:

10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]

15 **b. TikTok uses features to manipulate users into compulsive use**

16 91. TikTok has built specific features to increase users’ time spent on the Platform,  
17 which—independently and together—create the compulsive use, excessive use, and addiction  
18 that harm TikTok’s young users. These features increase users’ time on the Platform and promote  
19 unhealthy use regardless of the content.

20 **(1) Effects**

21 92. TikTok’s Platform contains filters, or “Effects,” which allow users to alter their  
22 appearance in photos and videos. As described in Section IV.F.1.d, these Effects are harmful to  
23 minor users. When combined with the Platform’s other features, they incentivize young users to  
24 alter their appearance in images and videos in ways that mimic cosmetic surgery and/or foster  
25 unrealistic beauty standards, among other body dysmorphic impacts that are known to harm  
26 self-esteem and induce negative body image.



1 Following feed, on another user’s profile, or in direct messages—the user endlessly and  
2 seamlessly moves from one video to the next simply by swiping up.

3 98. TikTok designed Infinite Scroll to endlessly load and/or offer new videos for the  
4 user to view as the user scrolls through their feed, removing any need to take action beyond a  
5 simple swipe to view more videos. As a user scrolls through their feed, the Platform continuously  
6 and perpetually selects and shows more videos to the user.

7 99. Endless scrolling compels young users to spend more time on the Platform by  
8 making it difficult to disengage. It strips away a natural stopping point or opportunity to turn to  
9 a new activity. This perpetual stream is designed to “keep [users] scrolling, and purposely  
10 eliminate any reason for [them] to pause, reconsider or leave.”<sup>11</sup> The user’s experience is a  
11 bottomless “flow state” that fully immerses users, distorts their perception of time, and has been  
12 shown to be associated with problematic use of social media platforms. TikTok knows that

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED], and it intentionally maintains those features.

#### 15 (4) TikTok Stories and TikTok LIVE

16 100. The ephemeral aspects of TikTok Stories, content that vanishes two hours after  
17 being posted, and TikTok LIVE, a livestreaming service within the Platform, are designed to  
18 encourage young users to compulsively return to the Platform by exploiting young users’  
19 uniquely sensitive “fear of missing out” (FOMO).

20 101. TikTok Stories allows users to post short videos that vanish after 24 hours. By  
21 design, this rapidly disappearing content pressures users to check the TikTok Platform more  
22 frequently. TikTok Stories are meant to “inspir[e] audiences to check on their favorite creators  
23 daily to never miss a thing.” [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25 \_\_\_\_\_  
26 <sup>11</sup> See Von Tristan Harris, *The Slot Machine in Your Pocket*, Spiegel Int’l (July 27, 2016),  
<https://archive.ph/Zi1Dg>.

1 102. TikTok similarly sought to leverage users’ FOMO with the TikTok LIVE feature.  
2 By default, LIVE content—livestreamed videos and real-time interaction with  
3 TikTok users—is available only once: while the creator livestreams. Users must tune in  
4 immediately or lose the opportunity to interact.

5 103. TikTok compounds the urgency to immediately view LIVE videos with push  
6 notifications designed to get users back on the Platform to watch the livestreamed videos, even  
7 if they occur at inappropriate times, such as during school.

8 104. TikTok viewed [REDACTED]. It  
9 believed [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]

12 **(5) Push Notifications**

13 105. Notifications are integral to TikTok’s business goal of prolonging youth time  
14 spent on its Platform. Notifications are TikTok-created signals displayed on a user’s device with  
15 TikTok-created messages that alert a user of activity on the Platform to prompt a return to or  
16 continued use of the app. These notifications contain messages crafted and sent by TikTok  
17 without third-party involvement. By default, TikTok enables a range of audio and visual  
18 “Push Notifications” when the app is installed on a smartphone.

19 106. The TikTok Platform’s [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED].

22 107. TikTok purposefully and carefully designed these notifications, including how  
23 they are “pushed” and displayed, to increase young users’ time spent on its Platform by taking  
24 advantage of well-understood [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED] and preying on youth’s social  
26 sensitivity and fear of missing out on seeing new activity. These notifications include buzzes,

1 lights, sounds, and onscreen messages with the [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED], and ultimately to the TikTok Platform.

3 108. Push notifications are accompanied by a [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED], to further draw the user’s attention. The badge  
5 remains until the user opens the TikTok Platform.

6 109. TikTok employees [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]

8 110. TikTok operationalized this goal by creating a plethora of push notifications to  
9 unfairly entice users by overloading and overwhelming them to compel a return to the Platform.  
10 Some pushes are designed to [REDACTED] altogether, and others  
11 encourage users to open the application.

12 111. Push notifications is one of the tactics TikTok uses to deploy  
13 “Intermittent Variable Rewards” (IVRs)—the same psychological mechanism that underlies the  
14 addictive nature of slot machines.

15 112. As discussed above, IVRs provide positive stimuli at random, unpredictable  
16 intervals interspersed with neutral stimuli. When positive stimuli is received (*e.g.*, a notification  
17 that someone “liked” your post), it creates a psychologically-pleasing dopamine release, keeping  
18 a user in a feedback loop to continually check the app for more rewarding stimuli. Because the  
19 rewards are unpredictable and intermittent, users never know if their next notification will be the  
20 one that makes them feel really good—which keeps users returning to the Platform  
21 compulsively.

22 113. TikTok knows that its IVR schedule for delivering notifications [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED].

24 114. TikTok has even used fictitious badge notifications to lure users onto the  
25 Platform. Badges are commonly used in smartphone applications to [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED] and ordinary users would understand it as such. TikTok relied on this

1 perception to manipulate users into opening its Platform. It designed a system to grab users’  
2 attention by displaying badges with random numbers unconnected to any actual content or  
3 interactions available on the Platform. TikTok employees [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 115. Notifications succeed at keeping users on the TikTok Platform as TikTok intends.

9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED].  
13 116. Notably, TikTok knows young users are directly harmed by receiving these  
14 incessant notifications, which operate to interfere with users’ free choice to stop using the  
15 Platform and disrupt their sleep. For example, [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED] Only recently did TikTok stop sending notifications  
18 during certain nighttime hours.

19 117. TikTok employs these coercive, deceptive, and relentless notifications because  
20 they are effective at keeping young users on its Platform—irrespective of their harmful health  
21 effects.

22 **(6) “Likes,” Comments, and Other Interactions**

23 118. TikTok’s notifications through “Likes,” comments, and other interactions,  
24 including the number of Likes and the timing, delivery, and packaging of notifications of positive  
25 social validation are classified as types of variable rewards since they are [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED]

1 119. Educators explain that Likes “serve as a reward for social media users.”<sup>12</sup> A  
2 New York University professor describes what happens to the brain when a user receives a  
3 notification that “someone ‘likes’ your post” on a social media platform as “[t]he minute you  
4 take a drug, drink alcohol, smoke a cigarette if those are your poison, when you get a ‘like’ on  
5 social media, all of those experiences produce dopamine, which is a chemical that’s associated  
6 with pleasure.”<sup>13</sup>

7 120. TikTok’s delivery of these dopamine rewards encourage users to post more  
8 videos and spend more time on the Platform, which promotes user retention and, again,  
9 financially benefits TikTok.

10 121. TikTok encourages users to respond to videos that have few Likes by  
11 automatically showing a TikTok-created prompt suggesting that the viewer should hit the Like  
12 button. TikTok’s reasoning behind this is that [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]  
14 122. TikTok designs and engineers its Platform to show users a [REDACTED] of Likes,  
15 comments, and view counts when they watch their own videos. This inundation of rewards  
16 encourages users to post even more videos.

17 123. TikTok publicly quantifies and displays the number of these pseudo-social  
18 interactions in a way that drives more use of its Platform, despite knowing the harmful effects  
19 on its teenage users. In internal documents, [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22  
23  
24 \_\_\_\_\_  
25 <sup>12</sup> See Sophia Petrillo, *What Makes TikTok so Addictive?: An Analysis of the Mechanisms Underlying the*  
26 *World’s Latest Social Media Craze*, Brown Undergraduate J. Pub. Health (Dec. 13, 2021),  
<https://archive.ph/tzIfz>.

<sup>13</sup> See Eames Yates, *What Happens to your Brain when you get a like on Instagram*, Business Insider,  
(Mar. 25, 2017), <https://archive.ph/rv4kk>.

1 124. TikTok recognizes that the way its Platform quantifies interactions, such as the  
2 number of Likes or comments, are of particular importance to teenagers. These interactions  
3 contribute to young users' FOMO, addictive use, and social comparison.

4 125. TikTok's own research shows that [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]. For example, [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]. Despite being aware of the psychological harms caused by Likes  
9 and similar social interactions, TikTok continues to purposely use various methods to display,  
10 quantify, package, and notify young users of these social validation metrics to exploit their social  
11 sensitivities and coerces young users to spend an unhealthy amount of time on the Platform.

12 126. [REDACTED] a report  
13 explaining how coercive design impacts teenagers:

14 Persuasive design strategies exploit the natural human desire to be  
15 social and popular, by taking advantage of an individual's fear of not  
16 being social and popular in order to extend their online use. For  
17 young people, identity requires constant attention, curation and  
18 renewal. At key development stages it can be overwhelmingly  
19 important to be accepted by your peer group.<sup>14</sup>

18 127. Accordingly, TikTok's features encourage increased time spent on the Platform  
19 and increased unhealthy, negative social comparisons. This in turn causes increased body image  
20 issues and related mental and physical disorders.

21 **2. The TikTok Platform engenders negative body image through "beauty"  
22 tools and filters that TikTok knows to be harmful to young users**

23 128. In addition to implementing features that cause compulsive and excessive use of  
24 the Platform, Defendants have made and continue to make design and engineering decisions that  
25 cause harm to young users in other ways. One significant example of this is the Platform's

26 <sup>14</sup> See Kidron, *supra* note 8, at 21.

1 so-called “beauty” features that implicitly encourage unhealthy, negative social  
2 comparisons—which, in turn, can cause body image issues and related mental and physical  
3 disorders.

4 129. A 2022 study found that use of the TikTok Platform was indirectly related to body  
5 dissatisfaction through “upward” appearance comparison (i.e., users comparing their own  
6 appearances to those of individuals they deem to be more attractive than themselves) and body  
7 surveillance (i.e., users scrutinizing and excessively monitoring their own body habitus), which  
8 results in greater body dissatisfaction.<sup>15</sup> The researchers also found that being exposed to a high  
9 volume of positive body-image media actually has a negative effect and results in an increase in  
10 appearance-comparison.

11 130. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Platform’s filters or “Effects,” which allow  
12 users to alter their appearance in photos and videos before posting them onto the Platform, can  
13 cause harm to users. These often-unrealistic appearance-altering filters are especially dangerous  
14 to young users because they can lead to negative self-obsession or self-hatred of their  
15 appearance. The Platform’s “beauty” filters also harm users by forcing comparison between their  
16 actual, “real-life” appearance and their edited appearance. Indeed, plastic surgeons have reported  
17 an increase in patients seeking procedures to look better on-screen and remark that the  
18 TikTok Platform’s advanced “Effects” “blur[] the line between fantasy and reality.”<sup>16</sup>  
19 Defendants know that these “Effects” can harm users, yet they choose to keep the “Effects” on  
20 the Platform and fail to disclose information about their known dangers in representations to  
21 users, including parents and youth.

22 131. Even more egregious than the “Effects” filters is the Platform’s “RETOUCH”  
23 feature, formerly called “Beauty” mode. TikTok Filters like “RETOUCH” incorporate [REDACTED]

24  
25 <sup>15</sup> See Danielle Bissonette Mink & Dawn M. Szymanski, *TikTok Use and Body Dissatisfaction: Examining*  
*direct, indirect, and moderated relations*, 43 *Body Image* 205, 205-08 (2022).

26 <sup>16</sup> Press Release, Am. Academy of Facial Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Inc., ‘TikTok Face’ Impact on  
Facial Plastic Surgery, <https://archive.ph/TMDXA> (last accessed May 30, 2024).

1 [REDACTED] to artificially augment the user’s appearance. Through the  
2 “RETOUCH” suite of tools, users can adjust many of their physical attributes so as to align with  
3 their sense of aspirational beauty standards. For example, “RETOUCH” can change the size and  
4 shape of a user’s nose, lips, and eyebrows; whiten their teeth; smooth their skin (known as  
5 [REDACTED] within TikTok); and adjust their skin tone or color.

6 132. Defendants chose to embed the “RETOUCH” feature into the Platform’s user  
7 interface such that the icon representing the “RETOUCH” toolset is available on the right-hand  
8 side of the screen whenever a user prepares to record a video.

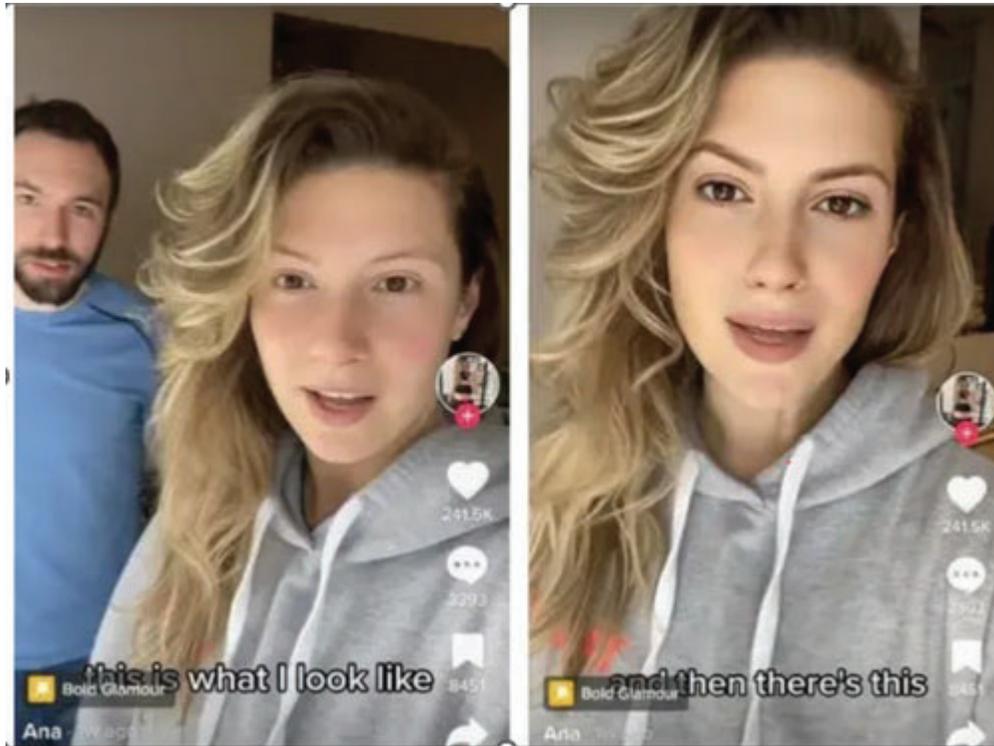
9 133. Defendants thus use the “RETOUCH” feature to capitalize on users’ physical  
10 insecurities [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]

18 134. Although Defendants’ release of the “RETOUCH” feature was regarded as a  
19 success for the Platform, internal research indicated that the [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED] This spurred Defendants to develop enhanced “beauty”  
21 filters and tools for the TikTok Platform.

22 135. In the spring of 2023, Defendants created, designed, and published the  
23 “Bold Glamour” filter. This extremely advanced “Effect,” like their “RETOUCH” tool, is a  
24 sophisticated face-altering feature that dramatically changes the user’s image, which may  
25 encourage unrealistic comparisons and foster body dysmorphia. The “Bold Glamour” filter  
26

1 modifies the user’s image to mimic the effects of makeup and cosmetic surgery. The following  
2 before and after photos of the “Bold Glamour” filter demonstrate the drastic results:



17 136. The “Bold Glamour Effect” has been wildly successful by Defendants’ measures,  
18 having been applied in over 224 million posts. And internal research offers insight into why:

19 [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]. Needless to say, these traits are all difficult, if not impossible,  
23 for users to change in real life without undergoing cosmetic surgery or other such risky and  
24 expensive intervention. The “Bold Glamour” filter implements these unnatural and unrealistic  
25 changes with the tap of a button—so long as the user’s eyes remain glued to the TikTok Platform  
26 on their screen.

1 137. Criticisms of Defendants’ approach to “beauty” features came to a head in  
2 March 2023, when the Dove personal care brand launched a campaign that urged the Platform’s  
3 users to #TurnYourBack on the “Bold Glamour” filter.<sup>17</sup> Dove’s campaign cited studies that  
4 found that 52% of girls reported using image-altering features every day, 80% had used a social  
5 media platform to change their appearance before the age of 13, and that 77% reported trying to  
6 change or hide at least one part of their body using Defendants’ “beauty” features.

7 138. But Defendants turned a deaf ear to the messaging of Dove’s campaign.  
8 Two months after the #TurnYourBack initiative, [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 139. [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 140. These “concerns” are a direct result of Defendants’ choices in the design and  
18 deployment of “beauty” features that have caused significant harm to young users. These harms  
19 include, but are not limited to: negative social comparison of one’s own physical appearance,  
20 including through the perpetuation of damaging beauty standards; eating disorders; body  
21 dysmorphia; and similar mental and physical health problems. That harm is only compounded  
22 by other TikTok product features that also encourage social comparison, such as those as  
23 described in Paragraphs 118 through 127.  
24  
25

26 <sup>17</sup> See Dove, *Dove Invites You to Take a Stand and #TurnYourBack to Digital Distortion*, PR Newswire  
(Mar. 8, 2023), <https://archive.ph/EO7Nk>.

1 141. A 2021 study measured the harmful impacts of “beauty” filters on users. It found  
2 that even users reporting a higher initial level of self-esteem felt that they looked 44% worse  
3 before their image was edited using a filter.<sup>18</sup> In a follow-up survey, “when the  
4 AR [augmented reality] filter increased the gap between how participants wanted to look and  
5 how they felt they actually looked, it reduced their self-compassion and tolerance for their own  
6 physical flaws.”<sup>19</sup>

7 142. Defendants are manifestly aware of the potentially harmful impacts of such  
8 “beauty” features on the TikTok Platform. They know, for instance, that [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED] Internal documents further reflect their  
11 awareness that [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED] But Defendants also know that “beauty” features, such as the Platform’s  
15 “Effects” (including the “Bold Glamour Effect”) and “RETOUCH” toolset, increase engagement  
16 with the TikTok Platform and, in turn, Defendants’ financial gain. And as with the design and  
17 functionality of the Platform’s recommendation system, the prospect of profit for Defendants  
18 supersedes their concerns for young users’ wellbeing.

19 143. By prioritizing user engagement with the TikTok Platform, Defendants have  
20 cultivated a generation of young users who spend hours a day on the  
21 Platform—more than they would otherwise choose. As described above, this is highly  
22 detrimental to teens’ development and ability to attend to personal needs and responsibilities.

23  
24  
25 <sup>18</sup> See Ana Javornik, et al., *Research: How AR Filters Impact People’s Self-Image*, Harv. Bus. Rev.  
26 (Dec. 22, 2021), <https://hbr.org/2021/12/research-how-ar-filters-impact-peoples-self-image>

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

1           **3. Through these features, the TikTok Platform knowingly harms children and**  
2           **teens in pursuit of profit**

3           144. Compulsive use of the Platform is harmful, especially for younger users.  
4 Compulsive use correlates with many negative mental health effects, such as [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]. Compulsive use of the Platform also [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]

9           145. The Platform’s addictive qualities, and the resulting excessive use by minors,  
10 directly harms those minors’ mental and physical health. Among the harms suffered by TikTok’s  
11 younger users are abnormal neurological changes, insufficient sleep, inadequate socialization  
12 with others, and increased risk of mood disorders such as depression and anxiety.

13           146. Internal TikTok documents [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]:

15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]

19           147. Further, [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]

22           148. Internally, [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]

1 149. Internal documents confirm that [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED].

4 150. Internal documents also confirm [REDACTED] that:

5 a. [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]

8 b. [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]

12 c. [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]

14 d. [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]

18 e. [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]

21 151. Academic researchers corroborate [REDACTED] that social media  
22 addiction, including TikTok usage, is harmful to minors. For example:

23 a. Research shows that experiencing puberty while being a heavy social  
24 media user interferes with a crucial developmental period for social  
25  
26

1 learning and friendship formation. Heavy users may emerge from puberty  
2 stunted or otherwise harmed, perhaps permanently.<sup>20</sup>

3 b. Research also shows that “[a]t the individual level, many [young people]  
4 have pointed to negative correlations between intensive social media use  
5 and both subjective well-being and mental health.”<sup>21</sup>

6 c. There is also a study that demonstrates that deactivating social media  
7 leads to “significant improvements in well-being, and in particular in  
8 self-reported happiness, life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety.”<sup>22</sup>

9 152. By maximizing the TikTok Platform’s addictive properties, TikTok has  
10 cultivated a generation of young users who spend hours a day on its Platform—more than they  
11 would otherwise choose—which is highly [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED].

13 153. One such harmful effect bears special mention: TikTok’s negative effect on  
14 young users’ sleep.

15 154. Insufficient sleep causes a slew of health problems for minors, including  
16 neurological deficiencies, dysregulated emotional functioning, heightened risk of suicide, and  
17 many other mental health harms. Excessive, compulsive, and addictive use of TikTok’s Platform  
18 keeps minors using it late at night and decreases the amount and quality of their sleep.

19 155. [REDACTED], as its internal research [REDACTED]:

- 20 a. [REDACTED]  
21 b. [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]

24  
25 <sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Amy Orben, et al., *Windows of Developmental Sensitivity to Social Media*,  
13 *Nature Commc’n* 1 (2022).

26 <sup>21</sup> See Hunt Allcott, et. al, *The Welfare Effects of Social Media*, 110 *Am. Econ. Rev.* 629, 630 (2020).

<sup>22</sup> See *id.*

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c. [REDACTED] ? [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

d. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

156. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] which TikTok's

internal documents [REDACTED]

157. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

158. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

To that end, some teenagers frequently wake up at night to check social media notifications.

159. Ultimately, TikTok [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to date TikTok has

not implemented features effective at keeping young users from accessing its Platform at all

hours of the night.

**E. TikTok Knows Its Features Harm Young Users But Has Not Made the Platform Safer**

160. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. But those safety improvements have

been stymied by TikTok's leadership's pursuit of profits. For example:

a. A comment on one internal document notes that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

b. One internal strategy document suggested [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

c. TikTok knows [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. However, TikTok's own former global head of minor

safety [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

d. TikTok employees have gone so far as to admit on video that teens are

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

**1. Compelling young users to spend more time on its Platform is key to TikTok's business model**

161. TikTok's business model [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

162. TikTok earns income by advertising third-party advertisements to users on its Platform. The advertisements take many forms, including full-screen ads that play when users

1 first open the Platform, in-feed ads that appear intermittently between non-advertisements,  
2 branded hashtag challenges (i.e., challenges promoted by Creators that call for viewers to  
3 perform certain tasks), branded filters, and video-editing effects.

4 163. The more user data TikTok collects, the better targeted advertising space it can  
5 sell, which increases its revenue.

6 164. TikTok has thus designed a business model in which it is incentivized to increase  
7 user engagement, with young users as its primary target in part because they become a pipeline  
8 of life-long users. [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 165. TikTok’s business model has been extremely profitable. In 2019, TikTok’s  
12 revenue was [REDACTED]. By 2022, it was over [REDACTED]. TikTok has been described as an  
13 “ads juggernaut” by *The New York Times*<sup>23</sup> and *The Wall Street Journal* has noted TikTok’s  
14 massive rise, even while other platforms have stumbled.<sup>24</sup>

15 166. *The New York Times* reported that TikTok’s success largely comes from the  
16 significant amount of time users spend on the Platform: “TikTok’s users spend an average of  
17 96 minutes a day on the app—nearly five times what they spend on Snapchat, triple their time  
18 on Twitter, and almost twice as much as their time on Facebook and Instagram.”<sup>25</sup>  
19 Rich Greenfield, a technology analyst quoted in the article, stated: “TikTok is eating the world.  
20 The only thing that matters in the world of entertainment is time spent[.]”<sup>26</sup>

21  
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24 <sup>23</sup> See Kalley Huang, et al., *TikTok Builds Itself Into an Ads Juggernaut*, N.Y. Times (Nov. 14, 2022),  
<https://archive.ph/Z70r6>.

25 <sup>24</sup> See Patience Haggin, *Google and Meta’s Advertising Dominance Fades as TikTok, Streamers Emerge*,  
Wall Street J. (Jan. 4, 2023), <https://archive.ph/xPRC9>.

26 <sup>25</sup> See Huang, *supra* note 23.

<sup>26</sup> See *id.*

1 167. TikTok's internal documents [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 168. Interviews of TikTok employees [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]. For  
6 example, [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED] An  
9 internal document also [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 169. A report from [REDACTED] an internal TikTok research group, [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED] The report also [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED].

16 **2. TikTok is willing to pay content creators and use shadow accounts to post**  
17 **more content to keep users on the Platform longer**

18 170. Many posts that young users see on the Platform are paid for, or otherwise created  
19 or developed, in whole or in part, by TikTok to give users on the Platform more material likely  
20 to manipulate them into staying online for longer periods.

21 171. [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED].

23 172. Building on its efforts to purchase content that would addict its users, TikTok  
24 launched its Creator Fund in 2020.

25 173. The Creator Fund was open to users who are allegedly over 18 and who have at  
26 least 10,000 followers and 100,000 video views within the previous 30 days. The amount TikTok

1 pays those users is based on several factors including, but not limited to, engagement and views.  
2 In other words, TikTok paid for content to increase user engagement and retention on the  
3 Platform.

4 174. [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]. For instance, [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED].

8 175. The current iteration of the Creator Fund is TikTok's Creator Rewards Program,  
9 which, TikTok claims, offers up to 20 times greater rewards (payouts) than the Creator Fund.  
10 The Creator Rewards Program provides payouts based on how engaging the posts are, including  
11 "Play Duration," "Audience Engagement" and "Search Value." TikTok not only directed the  
12 creators to post certain material intended to keep users on the Platform, it also gave personalized  
13 "suggestions based on your existing content, your followers' search interests, and potential  
14 earnings from the Creator Rewards Program."

15 176. TikTok also uploads content to TikTok in other manners. [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED].

18 [REDACTED] shadow accounts appeared to be regular users, but were actually operated and  
19 run by TikTok employees.<sup>27</sup>

20 177. The *Intercept* also reported that ByteDance asked employees to mine its  
21 competitor Instagram for popular content, such as posts tagged with #BeachGirl and upload the  
22 content to TikTok using shadow accounts.<sup>28</sup> Upon information and belief, posts tagged with  
23 #BeachGirl are often those of thin young women on beaches in bikinis and are the type of posts  
24 known to cause negative image comparison.

25 <sup>27</sup> See Sam Biddle, et al., *Invisible Censorship: TikTok Told Moderators to Suppress Posts by "Ugly"*  
26 *People and the Poor to Attract New Users*, *Intercept* (Mar. 16, 2020), <https://archive.ph/1n45R>.

<sup>28</sup> See *id.*

1 178. The gambit worked: [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 **3. TikTok [REDACTED] to enhance user safety and**  
4 **reduce compulsive use**

5 179. In 2022, a subset of TikTok employees [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18 180. However, even though [REDACTED] could have reduced many of the

19 harms the recommendation system wreaks on young users by reducing compulsive use of the

20 Platform, TikTok CEO Shou Chew [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]

22 181. TikTok also considered but failed to implement other alternate design features

23 related to screentime management and anti-addiction measures intended to help curb its users'

24 compulsive use of the Platform. For example:

25 a. TikTok decided [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

b. Notwithstanding TikTok’s [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] it took years for the company to roll out a  
feature allowing users to mute notifications. TikTok delayed making this  
easy fix [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. Even when  
TikTok finally implemented this feature, it did so in a substantially  
weakened form, by requiring minors to affirmatively opt into some  
aspects of the feature—which it knew minors rarely did.

c. TikTok continues to reject options that would help young users. Although  
internal documents note that [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] TikTok still refuses to impose actual meaningful  
restrictions.

d. TikTok represents that it set a 60-minute default screentime limit for users  
under the age of 18. However, TikTok’s “limit” is not a hard stop, but  
rather merely an easily avoidable checkpoint because users can disable  
the screen or enter a passcode. TikTok knows that its addictive features  
work to override young users’ free choice to regulate their time such that  
these options are rendered unreasonable, unrealistic, and ineffective.

182. By contrast, TikTok’s sister platform Douyin, which is available only in China,  
imposes effective minor safety restrictions, including limiting some minors to 40 minutes of use

1 per day and limiting the platform’s availability to certain hours. To prevent overuse and  
2 addiction, Douyin users also may face a five-second pause between videos if they spend too long  
3 on the app.

4 183. TikTok’s internal documents reveal that [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED] but, as indicated above, TikTok has chosen to not implement the same safety  
7 measures for young Americans.

8 184. To that end, TikTok’s former Global Head of Minor Safety said [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 185. Ultimately, TikTok intentionally chose not to utilize Douyin’s sensible minor  
14 safety restrictions on the TikTok Platform to protect young users in the United States.

15 **4. Due to TikTok’s unfair business model and coercive features outlined above,**  
16 **children and teenagers use the Platform compulsively to their detriment**

17 186. TikTok’s attempts to coerce young users into spending excessive amounts of time  
18 on the Platform have been successful. Many young users use the Platform compulsively and  
19 excessively, and some have become addicted to TikTok.

20 187. An internal TikTok research report [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]

1 188. As shown in the chart below, [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED].



12 189. Additional internal TikTok statistics show that, [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED].

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1 190. External surveys also show that 16% of U.S. teens say they use the  
2 TikTok Platform “almost constantly.”<sup>29</sup> Another 32% say they use it “several times a day.”<sup>30</sup> Of  
3 the teens aged 13 to 17 surveyed across all 50 states by the Boston Children’s Digital Wellness  
4 lab in 2022, 64% reported that they use TikTok daily.<sup>31</sup> As described in Section IV.D.3 *supra*,  
5 TikTok knows from its own research that such addictive use inflicts great mental and physical  
6 harm on young users.

7 **F. TikTok Deceives Young Users and Their Parents About Its Platform’s Safety**

8 191. TikTok tells users, particularly youth and parents, that its Platform is safe,  
9 well-moderated, and appropriate for young users. It publicly states that it provides a series of  
10 safety features to promote young users’ mental health.

11 192. But TikTok knows the truth: its Platform is unsafe and poorly moderated, and its  
12 touted features do not work as advertised. Through misrepresentation and omissions, TikTok  
13 deceives its users and the public in general.

14 **1. TikTok deceives young users and their parents about the harmful effects of**  
15 **its Platform and design features**

16 193. TikTok conceals known dangers caused by its design features from its young  
17 users and their parents and has actively misrepresented that the company prioritizes safety for  
18 young users:

- 19 a. On TikTok’s website, the company represents: “We care deeply about  
20 your well-being and seek to be a source of happiness, enrichment, and  
21 belonging . . . We work to make sure this occurs in a supportive space that  
22 does not negatively impact your physical or psychological health.”

24 <sup>29</sup> See Emily A. Vogels, et al., *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022*, Pew Research Ctr. (Aug. 10,  
25 2022), <https://archive.ph/ROMyQ>.

26 <sup>30</sup> See *id.*

<sup>31</sup> See David Bickham, et al., *The Digital Wellness Lab’s Pulse Survey, Adolescent Media Use: Attitudes, Effects, and Online Experiences*, Boston Children’s Digital Wellness Lab 10 (Aug. 2022).

- 1 b. In written testimony to Congress on March 23, 2023, CEO Shou Chew,  
2 who previously explained that he is “responsible for all the strategic  
3 decisions at TikTok”<sup>32</sup> stated: “Safety and wellness—in particular for  
4 teens—is a core priority for TikTok.”<sup>33</sup>
- 5 c. Shou Chew further testified: “[T]here are more than 150 million  
6 Americans who love our platform, and we know we have a responsibility  
7 to protect them, which is why I’m making the following commitments to  
8 you and to all our users. Number one, we will keep safety particularly for  
9 teenagers as a top priority for us.”
- 10 d. In a Ted Talk in April 2023, Shou Chew referred back to his commitments  
11 before Congress, reiterating his first commitment “that we take safety,  
12 especially for teenagers, extremely seriously, and we will continue to  
13 prioritize that.”<sup>34</sup> He went on to say, “[y]ou know, I believe that [we] need  
14 to give our teenage users, and our users in general, a very safe  
15 experience . . . If they don’t feel safe, we cannot fulfill our mission. So,  
16 it’s all very organic to me as a business to make sure that I do that.”
- 17 e. A major problem with catastrophic consequences for some users of  
18 TikTok was the “Blackout Challenge.” The media reported that children  
19 died after copying a trend on the Platform of suffocating themselves. As  
20 recently as April 2022, TikTok maintained an official media statement in  
21 response to the death of a Colorado child and a Pennsylvania child, stating  
22 in part: “At TikTok, we have no higher priority than protecting the safety  
23

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24 <sup>32</sup> See Celine Kang, *Who is Shou Chew, TikTok’s Chief Executive?* N.Y. Times (Mar. 23, 2023),  
<https://archive.ph/Rp9t9>.

25 <sup>33</sup> See Written Testimony of Shou Chew Before the U.S. House Comm. on Energy & Commerce,  
(March 23, 2023).

26 <sup>34</sup> See *TikTok’s CEO on Its Future — and What Makes Its Algorithm Different*, TED (Apr. 2023),  
<https://archive.ph/BHC0d>.

1 of our community, and content that promotes or glorifies dangerous  
2 behavior is strictly prohibited and promptly removed to prevent it from  
3 becoming a trend on our platform.” Many media outlets, such as The  
4 Associated Press, NBC, *The New York Post*, *Newsweek*, and *People*  
5 reported this statement attributable to TikTok in April 2021 and  
6 May 2022.<sup>35</sup>

7 f. TikTok touts its so-called “safety features” that, ostensibly, render the  
8 Platform safe. For instance, in a March 1, 2023 blog post, TikTok  
9 announced a series of features that allegedly increased the safety of the  
10 Platform. The blog post, under the “Safety” section of TikTok’s website,  
11 claimed that “[t]hese features add to our robust existing safety settings for  
12 teen accounts.”

13 g. Similarly, in an October 17, 2022 post on the TikTok website, TikTok  
14 claimed the Platform was safe: “We have a vibrant and inspiring  
15 community on TikTok, and it’s important that our platform remains a  
16 safe, supportive, and joyful place for our community.”

17 194. By engaging in these and similar misrepresentations, and by omitting critical,  
18 material information regarding its Platform’s risks, TikTok deceives users. TikTok’s deception  
19 and lack of transparency prevent young users and their parents from making truly informed  
20 decisions about Platform usage.

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24 <sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Chantal Da Silva, *Mother Sues TikTok After Daughter Dies Following “Blackout Challenge,”*  
25 NBC News (May 13, 2022), <https://archive.ph/8DAuq>; Matthew Impelli, *TikTok Blackout Choking Challenge*  
26 *Leads to 12-Year-Old Boy Becoming Brain Dead*, *Newsweek* (Mar. 30, 2021), <https://archive.ph/Pgd9e>;  
Joshua Rhett Miller, *Colorado Boy Left Brain-Dead After TikTok “Blackout Challenge” Dies*, *N.Y. Post* (Apr. 14,  
2021), <https://archive.ph/FzxYD>; Naledi Ushe, *Colorado Boy, 12, Dies 19 Days After Choking Himself in “Blackout*  
*Challenge” Found on TikTok*, *People* (Apr. 14, 2021), <https://archive.ph/aqbrs>; *Colorado Boy Dies After Taking*  
*Part in “Blackout Challenge,”* *Associated Press* (Apr. 14, 2021), <https://archive.ph/dyatx>.

1                   **a.     TikTok deceives users about its efforts to prolong user engagement**  
2                   **through compulsive design elements**

3                   195.   TikTok misleads consumers about the purpose and effect of the compulsive  
4 design elements it incorporates into its Platform. Leaders at TikTok downplay and deny the  
5 impact of the Platform’s compulsive design elements by emphasizing that the Platform provides  
6 a positive experience for users and incorporates time-management tools.

7                   196.   When asked by Congress in October 2021 if TikTok is specifically designed to  
8 keep users engaged as long as possible, a senior TikTok executive testified: “We want to make  
9 sure that people are having an entertaining experience, you know like TV or movies, TikTok is  
10 meant to be entertaining. But we do think we have a responsibility, along with parents, to make  
11 sure that it’s being used in a responsible way.”<sup>36</sup>

12                  197.   In his written testimony to Congress in March 2023, Shou Chew stated: “TikTok  
13 also has taken numerous steps to help ensure that teens under 18 have a safe and enjoyable  
14 experience on the app . . . We launch great products with a safety-by-design mentality, even if  
15 those features limit our monetization opportunities.” [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18                  198.   In April 2023 at a Ted Talk conversation, Shou Chew reiterated that TikTok’s  
19 “goal is not to optimize and maximize time spent. It is not.” He further denied that TikTok has  
20 a financial incentive to maximize users’ time spent on the Platform, stating: “Even if you think  
21 about it from a commercial point of view, it is always best when your customers have a very  
22 healthy relationship with your product . . .”

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25                   <sup>36</sup> See *U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation, Subcommittee Hearings:*  
26 *Protecting Kids Online: Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube*, (Oct. 26, 2021),  
<https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2021/10/protecting-kids-online-snapchat-tiktok-and-youtube> (last visited on  
Sept. 26, 2024).

1           199. This response deceptively omits TikTok’s relentless targeting of users’ time and  
2 attention and measuring success based on metrics such as how many young people use the  
3 Platform per day and month, how long they spend watching videos, how many videos they  
4 watch, and whether they keep coming back—a practice TikTok has engaged in for years. As  
5 discussed above, TikTok exploits psychological vulnerabilities to keep young users  
6 compulsively using its Platform.

7                           **b. TikTok deceives users about the efficacy of its so-called time**  
8                           **management and other safety tools**

9           200. In addition to omitting and misrepresenting critical information about the  
10 compulsive design of its Platform, TikTok also deceives consumers about its purported “safety  
11 features.” The TikTok app has several so-called screentime management functions, including:  
12 (1) a screentime limit: a purported feature to “limit” teen users to 60 minutes on the Platform by  
13 default; (2) a screentime dashboard: a page where users can “get a summary of your time spent  
14 on TikTok”; (3) family safety mode: a feature that “links a parent’s TikTok account to their  
15 teen’s” to allow parents to control teens’ daily screen time, ability to send direct messages on  
16 the app, and types of content teens may view; and (4) take a break videos: videos that are pushed  
17 at periodic intervals to encourage users to take a break from the Platform. TikTok advertises  
18 these features as tools to aid youth wellbeing, but the functions are designed to *appear* to reduce  
19 compulsive use without making meaningful changes.

20           201. TikTok promoted its screentime dashboard as a tool to help minors in press  
21 releases posted to its website in 2019 and 2020, external newsletters, such as its June 2022  
22 Creator Newsletter, and posts on TikTok’s website.

23           202. TikTok also promotes its screentime management tools to parents and guardians  
24 through partnership with the National PTA and in press releases on its website. For instance, in  
25 February 2022, TikTok published an article on its website entitled “Introducing Family Safety  
26 Mode and Screentime Management in Feed,” writing: “As part of our commitment to safety, the

1 wellbeing of our users is incredibly important to us. We want people to have fun on TikTok, but  
2 it's also important for our community to look after their wellbeing which means having a healthy  
3 relationship with online apps and services.”

4 203. TikTok executives have touted the Platform's in-app time management tools to  
5 counter perceptions that the Platform is designed to increase engagement. At a congressional  
6 hearing about prolonged engagement in October 2021, a TikTok executive emphasized, “We  
7 have take a break videos, we have time management tools, and family pairing is another tool  
8 where parents can help limit the time their teenagers are spending on the app.” Again, at a  
9 Ted Talk in April 2023, Shou Chew brought up TikTok's time management tools and  
10 interventions, stating: “If you spend too much time on our platform, we will proactively send  
11 you videos to tell you to get off the platform. And depending on the time of day: If it's late at  
12 night, [the video] will come sooner.” By touting these tools, TikTok creates the impression that  
13 it is effectively managing compulsive use, instead of encouraging it through TikTok's design  
14 features.

15 204. But TikTok knows this is not true. [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]

19 205. Through these representations, TikTok misleads consumers, particularly young  
20 users and their parents, into thinking that the app is not designed for compulsive use and in fact  
21 has effective tools to mitigate compulsive use, when it does not. In reality, and as discussed  
22 above compulsive use is woven into the very fabric of the app. TikTok's internal documents  
23 show that [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED], with TikTok's own statistics showing that [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]. By creating false  
26 impressions that TikTok mitigates compulsive use and by omitting critical information about

1 TikTok’s encouragement of compulsive use, TikTok engages in deceptive trade practices that  
2 prevent users from making informed decisions about their usage of the app.

3 **c. TikTok’s claimed 60-minute screentime limit is not an actual limit**

4 206. Announced right before Shou Chew testified to Congress in March 2023, TikTok  
5 has repeatedly represented that it sets an automatic 60-minute daily screentime limit for teens.

6 207. In a March 1, 2023 post on its website, former Head of Trust and Safety  
7 Cormac Keenan wrote that the screentime management tool would provide teen users with a  
8 “60-minute daily screen time limit.” But this tool does not actually impose a screen time limit:  
9 after using TikTok for 60 minutes, teens are simply prompted to enter a passcode that they have  
10 previously created in order to continue watching. Users can also freely change when this prompt  
11 occurs, with default options ranging from after 40 minutes to 2 hours on TikTok per day, or  
12 disable the tool entirely.

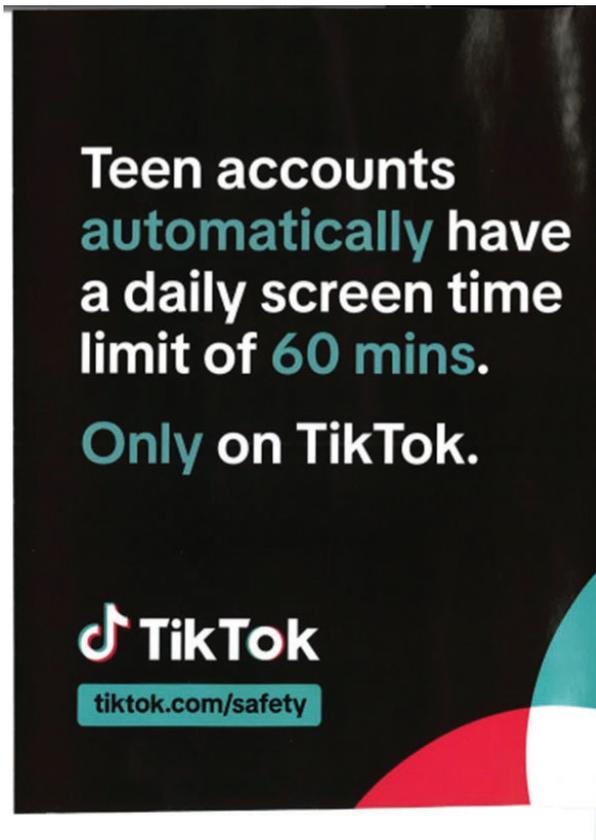
13 208. Research shows that the more time teens spend beyond their first hour on social  
14 media each day is directly connected to worsening mental health. [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]

20 209. [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED]  
3 210. TikTok’s default “time limit” proved to have negligible impact. [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED].

7 211. As public concern grew that TikTok is addictive and unsafe for teens, it was  
8 important for TikTok to convince parents that those concerns were being addressed. Therefore,  
9 after releasing the 60-minute-prompt tool, TikTok prominently advertised it to the public—but  
10 omitted how it actually works. For example, one advertisement in the *Washington Examiner*, a  
11 news magazine more likely to be read by adults than teens, stated only that “[t]een accounts  
12 automatically have a daily screen time limit of 60 mins. Only on TikTok.”



1           212. Nowhere in the advertisement does TikTok disclose that the screen time limit can  
2 be easily bypassed or even disabled. TikTok made similar or identical public representations in  
3 other contexts, including January 2024 advertisements for *The Washington Post* reading “[t]een  
4 accounts automatically have a daily screen time limit of 60 mins.” These statements were  
5 deliberate misrepresentations by TikTok, made when TikTok’s own data showed that its screen  
6 time limit had little effect on usage. Moreover, these advertisements gave the deceptive net  
7 impression to consumers—especially parents who do not use the Platform—that this tool  
8 imposes an actual limit on teen screen time, creating a false belief that TikTok effectively  
9 addressed concerns around excessive use.

10           213. While TikTok publicizes its safety features ostensibly intended to reduce  
11 compulsive use, internal analyses show that [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED].  
13           214. Rather, [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]. In other words, [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED] More specifically, according to an  
17 internal [REDACTED] document [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED].  
20           215. In a chat message [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED].  
25           216. TikTok also promotes screentime management tools for minors that it knows are  
26 ineffective. For example, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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218. TikTok also [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Similarly, TikTok [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

219. TikTok also touts its “Take a Break” videos that ostensibly encourage users to stop using the TikTok Platform after long sessions. TikTok CEO Shou Chew even referenced the “Take a Break” videos in an interview with Andrew Ross Sorkin of the *The New York Times* at the 2022 DealBook summit. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1           220. Another feature that TikTok heavily promotes to parents and parent groups is  
2 Family Pairing, which, according to TikTok, “allows parents and teens to customize their safety  
3 settings based on individual needs.” Yet TikTok knows the feature does not fix the problems its  
4 Platform causes. [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED] Moreover, teens can easily bypass  
7 Family Pairing. The function works only on TikTok’s mobile application, so teens can avoid  
8 parent-imposed restrictions simply by using their phone or desktop browser.

9           221. Not only are these screentime management features ineffective, but TikTok also  
10 makes them hard to find. Many of the features are hidden behind multiple screens, reducing their  
11 use and effectiveness. Internal documents [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15           222. TikTok unfairly compounded the addictiveness of the TikTok Platform for young  
16 users through their faulty and deceptive implementation of these features. TikTok touts these  
17 time management and other safety tools as if they are legitimate and effective interventions  
18 designed to promote young users’ healthy usage of the Platform. But TikTok withholds material  
19 information about the effectiveness of these tools and does not provide consumers crucial  
20 information to assess the safety of the Platform.

21                   **d. TikTok deceives users about its beauty filters**

22           223. Despite the known dangers caused by TikTok’s beauty filters and similar  
23 features, TikTok fails to provide any warning to its users (or their parents, when users are  
24 underage) that using the filters on its Platform can be dangerous.

25           224. TikTok omitted that it knew effects like beauty filters can harm young users and  
26 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]

7 225. TikTok knows that its beauty filters, other beautifying Effects, and Effects that  
8 rate physical attractiveness are dangerous to young users. Nonetheless, TikTok actively  
9 promotes them. By omitting the dangers of these features, TikTok actively conceals the features’  
10 known dangers from its users and their parents.

11 226. Instead of a page warning about the harm caused by beauty features, TikTok has  
12 an entire webpage devoted to “Youth Safety and Well-Being” where it claims the company is  
13 “deeply committed to TikTok being a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18  
14 (we refer to them as ‘youth’ or ‘young people’).” It goes on to proclaim that youth safety is a  
15 “priority,” and that TikTok creates a “developmentally appropriate” experience that is a  
16 “safe space” for “self-exploration.”

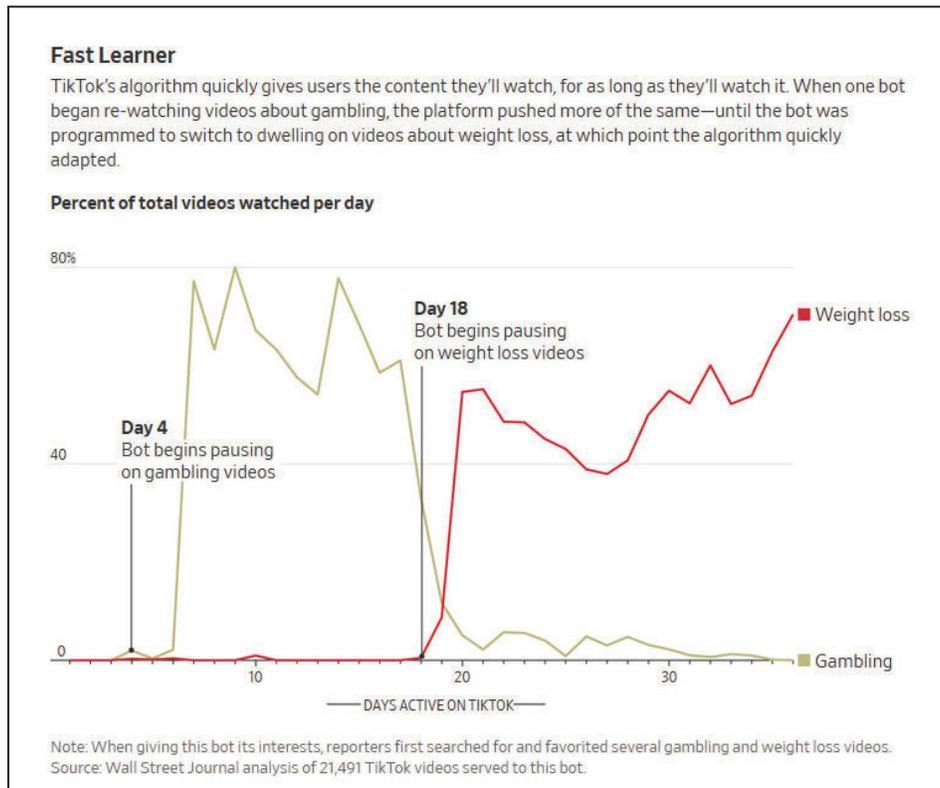
17 **2. TikTok deceives young users and their parents about the efficacy of its**  
18 **“Refresh” and “Restricted Mode” features**

19 227. In addition to omitting and misrepresenting critical information about the  
20 Platform’s compulsive design features, TikTok deceives consumers by promoting features  
21 purportedly designed to help users manage the content the recommendation system feeds them,  
22 including the “Refresh” feature, which allegedly allows users to “reset” their For You feed, and  
23 “Restricted Mode,” which allegedly limits the appearance of content that may not be appropriate  
24 for all audiences.

1                   **a.     TikTok falsely represents users’ ability to “Refresh” their feed and**  
2                   **escape harmful rabbit holes**

3                   228.     A TikTok user experiences a “rabbit hole” (also known as a “filter bubble”) when  
4 they encounter a high percentage of sequential videos on the same or similar topics. TikTok  
5 knows that rabbit holes harm their young users—particularly when these rabbit holes feed  
6 young users videos that trigger anxiety or depression, or provoke other harmful effects (for  
7 example, by feeding users videos that trigger FOMO, harmful social comparison, self-harm or  
8 disordered eating).

9                   229.     The recommendation system creates rabbit holes by quickly evaluating users’  
10 interests and then repeatedly pushing videos about those interests regardless of content.  
11 *The Wall Street Journal* published a chart showing just how quickly the recommendation system  
12 learns a user’s interest and then pushes Tik content related to that interest.<sup>37</sup>



37 See Tawnell D. Hobbs, et al., ‘*The Corpse Bride Diet*’: How TikTok Inundates Teens With Eating-Disorder Videos, Wall Street J. (Dec. 17, 2021), <https://archive.ph/bTvIb>.

1           230. In internal documents, [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED].  
3           231. After *The Wall Street Journal* exposé on TikTok’s algorithm and the harm caused  
4 to users stuck in rabbit holes, TikTok made changes to its Platform that it calls “Algo Refresh.”

5           232. The Algo Refresh feature purportedly allows users suffering from  
6 rabbit holes—or who are otherwise dissatisfied with the videos TikTok feeds them—to “reset”  
7 their For You feed. According to an internal [REDACTED] document, [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10          233. After much [REDACTED] and external pressure, on March 16, 2023, TikTok announced  
11 the new “Refresh your For You feed” feature.

12          234. TikTok billed the Refresh feature on its website as “[t]he option to start fresh on  
13 TikTok.”

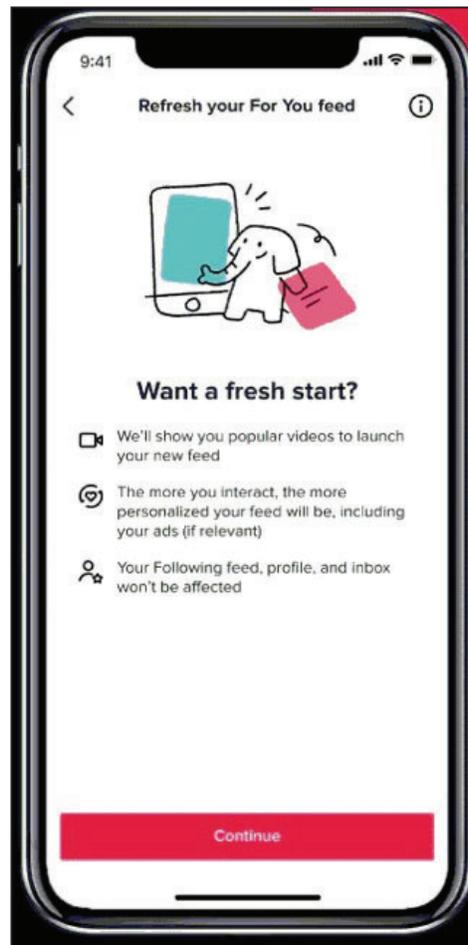
14          235. It further explained that: “When enabled, this feature allows someone to view  
15 content on their For You feed as if they just signed up for TikTok. Our recommendation system  
16 will then begin to surface more content based on new interactions.”

17 ///

18 ///

19 ///

1           236.   TikTok makes similar statements to users who access the Refresh feature on the  
2 TikTok Platform. When users open the “Refresh your For You feed” page in the Platform’s  
3 settings, they are asked: “Want a fresh start?” The Platform informs users that activating the  
4 Refresh feature will allow them to “launch your new feed.”



21           237.   Spokespeople for TikTok repeated these claims to reporters. For instance, the  
22 news outlet *TechCrunch* reported in February 2023:

23                   With the new refresh button, which will be available in account  
24 settings, users will be able to force the app to bring “new, diversified  
25 content not based on previous activity or interactions” to their  
26 For You feed. After hitting the button, users will then begin to see  
content that’s based on their new interactions, a TikTok spokesperson  
told TechCrunch. In addition to providing a refreshed feed, the

1 company noted that the feature could serve as a way to support  
2 potentially vulnerable users who want to distance themselves from  
3 their current content experience.<sup>38</sup>

4 238. These public statements gave consumers the deceptive net impression that  
5 resetting the For You feed would result in a completely new feed as if they were new users, and  
6 that they would be able to escape rabbit holes of harmful content.

7 239. However, the Refresh feature was never expected to succeed. First, this feature is  
8 hidden behind a complex series of settings. [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 240. Not only did TikTok hide the Refresh feature, it also limited its functionality.

15 [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

21 241. For users previously stuck in rabbit holes, the recommendation system quickly  
22 reintroduces videos based on the same engagement data that led them into the rabbit hole in the  
23 first place.

24

25

26 <sup>38</sup> See Sarah Perez, *TikTok Introduces a Strike System for Violations, Tests a Feature to 'Refresh' the For You Feed*, TechCrunch (Feb. 2, 2023), <https://archive.ph/jadQb>.

1           242. The Refresh feature also fails [REDACTED], despite  
2 TikTok’s claims to the contrary. TikTok falsely represented to users considering the  
3 Refresh feature that “[t]he more you interact, the more personalized your feed will be, including  
4 your ads (if relevant).” However, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED].  
7           243. TikTok did not even make the Refresh feature available for some users. [REDACTED],  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED].

11           244. TikTok omitted these material facts, repeatedly misleading users with highly  
12 deceptive statements that the Refresh feature was “a fresh start” and would wipe prior use so that  
13 it was as if the user “had just signed up for TikTok.” Contrary to TikTok’s representations, users  
14 found that they were quickly back in the same rabbit hole again even after using the Refresh  
15 feature.

16                   **b. TikTok deceives users about Restricted Mode’s ability to filter**  
17                   **inappropriate content for minors**

18           245. TikTok misled users about the efficacy of “Restricted Mode,” which TikTok  
19 publicly described in an October 2019 post to its Newsroom as “an option that limits the  
20 appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all audiences.”

21           246. An article posted to the “Safety” section of TikTok’s Newsroom advises parents  
22 to enable this tool for their teens: “Note: If you’re a parent and your teen uses TikTok, it might  
23 make sense to enable this setting to ensure the content they are viewing is age-appropriate.”

24           247. On its website, TikTok says that users in Restricted Mode “shouldn’t see mature  
25 or complex themes, such as: [p]rofanity[, s]exually suggestive content[, r]ealistic violence or  
26 threatening imagery[, f]irearms or weapons in an environment that isn’t appropriate[, i]llegal or

1 controlled substances/drugs[, and e]xplicit references to mature or complex themes that may  
2 reflect personal experiences or real-world events that are intended for older audiences.”

3 248. TikTok advertised the Platform’s Restricted Mode as an “‘appropriate’  
4 experience” to “family-oriented partners,” such as the National Parent Teacher Association and  
5 Family Online Safety Institute.

6 249. TikTok promoted this feature to its partners to achieve increased publicity of its  
7 deceptive claims. In TikTok’s estimation, [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]—an understanding that  
9 was then reflected in several “media stories.”

10 250. Yet TikTok knew that Restricted Mode did not function in the manner TikTok  
11 represented, and instead only filtered limited categories of potentially objectionable content.

12 251. Indeed, nearly two years after TikTok began making these misrepresentations on  
13 its website, [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]

16 252. [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED].

22 253. [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]

24 254. Moreover, Restricted Mode encompasses only the For You feed. A young user  
25 using the TikTok Platform can easily circumvent the feature in a myriad of ways, for example,  
26 watching videos that they search for, are sent directly to them, or uploaded by accounts they

1 follow. Again, TikTok’s promotion of and public statements related to Restricted Mode were  
2 highly deceptive, with TikTok creating the deceptive net impression that Restricted Mode  
3 created a safer and more controlled user experience, all the while knowing that this was not the  
4 case.

5 **3. TikTok deceives young users and their parents about the application and**  
6 **enforcement of its Community Guidelines**

7 255. TikTok misrepresents and omits critical information about the application and  
8 enforcement of its “Community Guidelines.” Specifically, TikTok misrepresents how  
9 effectively the Guidelines are applied, to whom and what they apply, and the role of experts in  
10 forming the Community Guidelines.

11 **a. TikTok deceives users about how effectively Community Guidelines**  
12 **are applied**

13 256. In its Community Guidelines, TikTok claims that it “remove[s] content—whether  
14 posted publicly or privately—when [TikTok] find[s] that it violates [TikTok’s] rules.” TikTok’s  
15 Community Guidelines set out a number of rules as to different types of topics, including not  
16 allowing any “violent threats, promotion of violence, incitement to violence, or promotion of  
17 criminal activities that may harm people, animals, or property,” “hate speech, hateful behavior,  
18 or promotion of hateful ideologies,” “youth sexual or physical abuse or exploitation,” “showing,  
19 promoting, or sharing plans for suicide or self-harm,” “showing or promoting disordered eating  
20 and dangerous weight loss behaviors,” and “showing or promoting dangerous activities and  
21 challenges,” among other rules.

22 257. TikTok has long made statements to this effect, including when speaking to  
23 reporters, parents, and government regulators.

24 258. For instance, Shou Chew testified to Congress on March 23, 2023, that “anything  
25 that is violative and harmful we remove [from the Platform].” Similarly, when he testified to  
26 Congress on January 31, 2024, Chew claimed that TikTok’s “robust Community Guidelines

1 strictly prohibit content or behavior that puts teenagers at risk of exploitation or other  
2 harm—and we vigorously enforce them.”<sup>39</sup> TikTok repeated that latter statement on its  
3 Newsroom website.

4 259. TikTok uses the comprehensiveness of its Community Guidelines to reassure  
5 parents and others that its Platform is a safe product for young users. TikTok represents that its  
6 Community Guidelines “apply to everyone and everything on our platform.”

7 260. In a Ted Talk in April 2023, Shou Chew explained that TikTok has “very clear  
8 community guidelines. We are very transparent about what is allowed and what is not allowed  
9 on our platform. No executives make any ad hoc decisions. And based on that, we have built a  
10 team that is tens of thousands of people plus machines in order to identify content that is bad and  
11 actively and proactively remove it from the platform.”

12 261. But TikTok’s actual internal policies and practices have long differed  
13 substantially from its Community Guidelines and other public statements, with respect to both  
14 user-generated content and advertisements on the Platform.

15 262. Even though TikTok’s Community Guidelines claim that content about  
16 dangerous “challenges” (e.g., Blackout Challenge”), seductive performances by minors, drugs,  
17 gore, and physically dangerous behavior is removed or not allowed under its terms of service, in  
18 many circumstances, TikTok knowingly and intentionally permits such content to remain on the  
19 Platform. Instead of actually removing such harmful content from the Platform, as it claims it  
20 does, TikTok often simply moves certain videos out of users’ For You feed. [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED].

24

25

26 <sup>39</sup> See *Senate Hearing with CEOs of Meta, TikTok, X, Snap and Discord About Child Safety 1/31/24 Transcript*, Rev (Feb. 1, 2024), <https://archive.ph/jumPM>.

1           263. When content [REDACTED], it  
2 remains visible and available on the Platform.

3           264. For example, TikTok’s Community Guidelines claim that content by  
4 minors—“that intends to be sexually suggestive” is prohibited on the Platform. Per the  
5 Guidelines, “[t]his includes intimate kissing, sexualized framing, or sexualized behavior.”  
6 TikTok does not actually enforce this provision of the Community Guidelines. Rather, videos  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED] are not prohibited on the Platform in the United States.

10 Instead, such a video is merely [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED].  
12 [REDACTED]. Despite TikTok’s  
13 statements that its Community Guidelines are designed to protect younger users, [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED].

16           265. Similarly, instead of removing “[d]angerous weight loss behaviors”  
17 videos—such as videos that promote laxatives to lose weight, or videos that promote losing more  
18 than 10 pounds of weight in a week through diet or exercise routines—from the Platform, as  
19 stated in the Community Guidelines, TikTok [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED], they remain visible to and searchable by minors. [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]:

24 [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED]

4 266. TikTok engaged in similar conduct for other types of videos as well. For example,  
5 the Community Guidelines claim that TikTok “do[es] not allow the trade of alcohol, tobacco  
6 products, and or [sic] drugs” and “do[es] not allow showing, possessing, or using drugs.”

7 267. The Community Guidelines further disallow “[m]arketing tobacco products,  
8 drugs, or other regulated substances” and “[s]howing, possessing, or using drugs or other  
9 regulated substances recreationally, including signs of being under the influence.”

10 268. Yet contrary to this representation, videos that feature illegal drugs remain on  
11 TikTok’s Platform. Videos promoting drugs by [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED] were also left on  
13 the Platform. [REDACTED].

14 269. In some instances, TikTok’s Community Guidelines had policies that were never  
15 enforced at all. An internal document [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]

20 270. Similarly, TikTok’s Community Guidelines clearly prohibit content “[s]howing  
21 or promoting” “[d]angerous driving behavior, such as exceeding the speed limit, running a red  
22 light, or distracted driving (including live streaming while driving).” [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED].

25 271. TikTok also failed to remove gore even though its current Community Guidelines  
26 state: “We do not allow gory, gruesome, disturbing, or extremely violent content.” Gore, like

1 | drugs and dangerous driving, remains available on the Platform, [REDACTED]

2 | [REDACTED]

3 | 272. This pattern applies to other parts of the Platform too. For instance, the “Accounts  
4 | and Features” section of the Community Guidelines describes, among other things, TikTok’s  
5 | policies governing “Comments and Direct Messages.” Here, TikTok claims that “[a] violation  
6 | of our rules will lead to restricted visibility or the removal of comments, or a restriction on  
7 | sending direct messages, and may lead to an account ban if there is a severe violation.” But direct  
8 | messages are subject to an even less restrictive set of rules.

9 | 273. For instance, as discussed above, the Community Guidelines claim that the  
10 | Platform prohibits “content by young people that intends to be sexually suggestive.” Such videos  
11 | are not recommended to young users through the For You feed. But TikTok does not prohibit or  
12 | in any way reduce the visibility of such videos when they are sent via direct message. Similarly,  
13 | content showing minors possessing or using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco are, according to the  
14 | Community Guidelines, forbidden from the Platform. But that rule is not enforced for direct  
15 | messages.

16 | 274. While TikTok touts its moderators, internally it knows that [REDACTED]  
17 | [REDACTED].  
18 | This ineffective system results in much of the Platform not being meaningfully moderated. For  
19 | example, [REDACTED]. For many  
20 | types of content, [REDACTED]  
21 | [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
22 | [REDACTED]  
23 | [REDACTED].

24 | 275. Even though TikTok did not comply with its own Community Guidelines, it  
25 | directed employees to announce otherwise. When managing negative fallout after press reported  
26 | that a child was in the emergency room after attempting a dangerous TikTok challenge, [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 **b. TikTok misrepresented the prevalence of the Blackout Challenge on**  
5 **its Platform and pushed a deceptive public narrative**

6 276. Furthering TikTok’s misrepresentation that its Platform is well-moderated and  
7 safe for young users, TikTok deceptively pushed a false narrative that the “Blackout Challenge”  
8 did not appear on its Platform, when, in fact, [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED].

11 277. The “Blackout Challenge” is an especially dangerous online challenge that has  
12 resulted in the deaths of multiple children. The challenge, also known as “Choking” or  
13 “Pass-Out Challenge,” pushes young people to participate in risky and dangerous behavior of  
14 choking themselves until they are unconscious.

15 278. In January 2021, TikTok [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

19 279. Later that year, however, when asked by media outlets to comment on the  
20 dangerous online challenge that was appearing on TikTok, [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED].

23 Interestingly, [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED].

25 Initially in July 2021, [REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED] Later in 2021, [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED], TikTok pivoted its statement to say: “We

4 prioritize the safety of our community and strictly prohibit and remove dangerous challenges

5 from our platform. While we still have not found evidence of a ‘blackout challenge’ *trending* on

6 our platform, we remain vigilant in our commitment to user safety.”<sup>40</sup> Multiple news outlets

7 relayed these statements and provided a foothold for TikTok’s deceptive public narrative.

8 **c. TikTok omits key information when discussing its content**  
9 **moderation enforcement**

10 280. TikTok has misled the public as to the diligence of its content moderation. To

11 reassure the public of its commitment to content moderation, TikTok published metrics such as

12 “proactive removal” rate, but this metric simply captured how fast TikTok removed content that

13 it managed to catch. Internally, TikTok notes that [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16 281. Although TikTok boasts thorough content review processes, it does not disclose

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

23 282. TikTok also omitted that its content moderation policies have [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25 \_\_\_\_\_

26 <sup>40</sup> See <https://people.com/human-interest/family-of-10-year-old-boy-speaks-out-police-say-tiktok-challenge-may-have-led-to-his-death/>.

1 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]. This lack of meaningful oversight  
3 in content moderation exposes youth to harmful harassment, bullying, and solicitation. Tellingly,  
4 TikTok has only recently publicized metrics regarding removing comments and those metrics  
5 only demonstrate that TikTok removed comments beginning in 2024.

6 283. TikTok’s omission of these facts from its representations deceptively assure  
7 consumers, particularly parents and youth, that its content moderation is increasingly effective.

8 **d. TikTok misrepresents who is subject to its Community Guidelines**

9 284. On its website, TikTok states that it applies its Community Guidelines “to  
10 everyone and everything on our platform.” Despite this representation, TikTok treats some users  
11 differently.

12 285. TikTok [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED].

19 286. Even when TikTok’s moderation team wanted to enforce the  
20 Community Guidelines, certain groups of users [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]

23 287. For accounts that TikTok [REDACTED] an internal analysis [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED] found that [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED]

1 own Community Guidelines, TikTok misled consumers by stating it removed harmful material  
2 but left much of that material on its Platform.

3 **e. TikTok misrepresents its incorporation of expert recommendations**  
4 **into its Community Guidelines**

5 288. TikTok announces on its website that its Community Guidelines “are informed  
6 by international legal frameworks and industry best practices, including the UN Guiding  
7 Principles on Business and Human Rights, the International Bill of Human Rights, the  
8 Convention on the Rights of Children, and the Santa Clara Principles,” with “input from our  
9 community, safety and public health experts, and our Advisory Councils.” However, TikTok  
10 contradicts expert recommendations in its creation and enforcement (or lack thereof) of the  
11 Community Guidelines. For example, [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 289. In addition to failing to implement expert recommendations, TikTok misstates  
15 expert recommendations. For instance, Shou Chew testified before Congress in March 2023 that  
16 TikTok is working with experts to build policies for content that is “not inherently harmful, like  
17 some of the extreme fitness videos about people running 100 miles” but can become harmful if  
18 shown too much. Mr. Chew said that “the experts are telling us that we should disperse [this  
19 content] more, and make sure that they are not seen too regularly . . . [e]specially by younger  
20 users.”

21 290. [REDACTED], TikTok knew that [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED].

1 291. Contrary to TikTok’s public statements, it has not aligned its practices with expert  
2 recommendations. TikTok misrepresents what experts recommend and its implementation of  
3 those recommendations.

4 **4. TikTok deceives young users and their parents about its ability to keep kids**  
5 **off its 13+ Platform and about the safety of “Kids Mode”**

6 292. TikTok’s growth in the United States has been fueled by young users’ use of its  
7 Platform, including by users under the age of thirteen.

8 293. TikTok has nonetheless reassured the public that it has designed a specific,  
9 limited experience for under 13 users, TikTok’s “Kids Mode,” and that use of its standard  
10 Platform is limited to users over 13.

11 294. TikTok has made these reassurances despite knowing that its age verification  
12 practices are easily circumvented by under 13 users and that under 13 users are present on its  
13 standard Platform.

14 **a. TikTok allowed users under the age of 13 onto its 13+ Platform and**  
15 **mishandled their accounts**

16 295. Starting in 2017, Musical.ly required most new users to enter their age to create  
17 an account on the app, and this change carried over to the TikTok Platform following  
18 Musical.ly’s rebranding as TikTok in August 2018.

19 296. [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]. Additionally, users  
23 who created a TikTok account by inputting their Facebook or Google credentials [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED].

25 297. TikTok’s age verification system thus had a critical loophole: [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED] . [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED] .

6 298. [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED] . Despite its actual knowledge that each of these users was under 13 years old,  
8 TikTok continued to collect and use personal information from the children’s accounts.

9 299. This was not an isolated incident—throughout its lifespan, TikTok has known  
10 that there were, and continue to be, large numbers of children joining and using the Platform.

11 For example, internal TikTok documents [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED] . [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED] . [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]

15 300. [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED] . [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]

19 301. An internal document [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]

22 302. An internal TikTok Trust and Safety Memo [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]

24 303. [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]

26

1 [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 304. [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 305. An internal [REDACTED] document [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 b. **TikTok’s internal account-removal policies** [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 306. Before April 1, 2020, TikTok’s content moderation team followed a defective  
15 internal policy when removing accounts that TikTok “suspected” belonged to a user under  
16 age 13. Under that policy, [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]. In other words, for example, [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]. And TikTok would continue to collect  
22 that child’s personal information.

23 307. A more recent account removal policy amended this process, but it was also  
24 fundamentally flawed. [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]

26 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]. In such

6 cases, TikTok continues to knowingly collect and use that child's personal information.

7 **c. TikTok knows that many children bypass its ineffective age gate, if**  
8 **an age gate is used at all**

9 308. Websites and online services sometimes attempt to screen certain users based on  
10 the user's age. Often, this screening is attempted through a screen prompting a user to enter their  
11 date of birth. This process is often called an "age gate" or "age-gating."

12 309. On the occasions when TikTok has used an age gate, it has predominantly been  
13 used during account creation, or for accounts that were on the Platform but had not supplied age  
14 information when the account was initially created.

15 310. TikTok's age gate depends on children to self-report their age, and while the  
16 age gate may sometimes effectively filter some users under age 13 into "Kids Mode," TikTok  
17 knows that under-13 users routinely supply a false date of birth when registering for TikTok.

18 311. Not only does TikTok know that children under age 13 easily circumvent its  
19 age gate, but TikTok also expects that its age-gating processes incentivize children to lie about  
20 their age.

21 312. [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED].

1 313. [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED].  
3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED].  
5 [REDACTED].  
6 314. While these numbers, in absolute terms, are high, they are a fraction of the total  
7 number of potential underage accounts. [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED].  
10 315. [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]. Users who created TikTok accounts before May 2022 by  
13 inputting their Facebook or Google credentials had simply been granted full access to the  
14 TikTok Platform without ever seeing an age gate on TikTok.

15 316. [REDACTED], TikTok described [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED].  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED].

22 317. A document [REDACTED] shows that TikTok [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]. That  
24 same document reveals that [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED].

3 **d. TikTok reassures young users and their parents that users under 13**  
4 **will have an appropriate experience in “Kids Mode”**

5 318. TikTok has repeatedly assured the public that kids under age 13 have a separate,  
6 protected experience on TikTok and are not allowed on the standard Platform.

7 319. According to TikTok’s website, “[i]n the US, we offer a curated, view-only  
8 experience for those under age 13 that includes additional safeguards and privacy protections.  
9 We partner with Common Sense Networks to select content that it deems to be both  
10 age-appropriate and safe for an audience under 13.”

11 320. TikTok’s CEO Shou Chew personally pushes this messaging. In both written and  
12 oral testimony to Congress and a Ted Talk interview following his Congressional testimony, he  
13 reiterated:

14 a. “As an initial matter, TikTok offers a separate experience in the  
15 United States for people under 13. In the United States, people under 13  
16 are directed to a separate, curated viewing experience, with stringent  
17 safeguards and privacy protections designed specifically for them.”

18 b. “An eight-year-old’s experience on TikTok will be so highly restricted  
19 that every single piece of content he or she will see will be vetted by  
20 Common Sense, our third-party child safety expert . . . the eight-year-old  
21 will not be able to post, and the eight-year-old will not be able to see any  
22 personalized feed and zero advertising in that experience.”<sup>41</sup>

23 c. “If you look at the under-13 experience in the US, it’s much more  
24 restricted than the under-14 experience in China. It’s so restrictive, that

25 \_\_\_\_\_  
26 <sup>41</sup> Justin Hendrix, Transcript: TikTok CEO Testifies to Congress, <https://techpolicy.press/transcript-tiktok-ceo-testifies-to-congress/> (last visited Sep. 26, 2024).

1 every single piece of content is vetted by our third-party child safety  
2 expert. And we don't allow any under-13s in the US to publish, we don't  
3 allow them to post, and we don't allow them to use a lot of features.”

4 d. “In our industry, we rely mainly on something called age gating, which is  
5 when you sign up for the app for the first time and we ask you for the age.  
6 Now, beyond that, we also have built tools to go through your public  
7 profile for example, when you post a video, we try to match the age that  
8 you said with the video that you just posted.”

9 e. “In addition to an industry standard age gate, TikTok also uses both  
10 technology (e.g., text-based models like Natural Language Processing)  
11 and human moderation to help determine whether a user may be under  
12 18 years old. If a user is suspected of being under 18, the livestream is  
13 sent for human moderation. People on TikTok can also report potentially  
14 underage users. If a moderator concludes the host appears to be under  
15 18 years old, the livestream is stopped immediately and the user is  
16 suspended.”

17 321. Internal TikTok documents [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]

21 322. TikTok recently doubled down on the effectiveness of its age verification and  
22 age gating processes in response to federal allegations that TikTok violated COPPA. TikTok  
23 stated to the press, “We disagree with these allegations, many of which relate to past events and  
24 practices that are factually inaccurate or have been addressed. We are proud of our efforts to  
25  
26

1 protect children, . . . we offer age-appropriate experiences with stringent safeguards, [and]  
2 proactively remove suspected underage users, . . .”<sup>42</sup>

3 323. TikTok also continues to provide the public with information regarding the  
4 number of accounts suspected to be under the age of 13 that were removed from the Platform.  
5 As with content moderation metrics reported by TikTok and discussed *supra* Section IV.F.3.c,  
6 such metrics are misleading since they do not account for the [REDACTED] of accounts that  
7 TikTok allows on the Platform without age verification.

8 324. In sum, TikTok cultivates a public narrative of being dedicated to protecting  
9 young users and creating age-appropriate experiences for them. It emphasizes that it employs  
10 age gating and supplements age gating with technology, tools, human moderation, and  
11 safeguards to remove suspected underage users. It touts the number of accounts that are  
12 suspended or removed while failing to disclose that there are many times more accounts that are  
13 not associated with an age at all. TikTok’s narrative and its omissions are deceptive and  
14 misleading and violate Washington law.

15 **G. TikTok Engages in Deceptive and Unfair Acts and Practices in Trade or**  
16 **Commerce in Washington**

17 325. TikTok’s deceptive acts and practices alleged herein occurred in trade or  
18 commerce in Washington within the meaning of RCW 19.86.010(2).

19 **1. TikTok offers a variety of products and services centered around its**  
20 **Platform**

21 326. TikTok enters into contracts with thousands of users across the country. Although  
22 users can establish accounts on TikTok without paying a fee, TikTok’s services are not free.  
23 TikTok charges its users by collecting their time and data, including users’ locations, interests,  
24 and behaviors, which it then converts into advertising dollars. This is outlined in TikTok’s Terms

25 \_\_\_\_\_  
26 <sup>42</sup> Todd Spangler, *TikTok Sued by U.S. Justice Department for Allegedly ‘Knowingly and Repeatedly’  
Violating Child Data Privacy Law*, <https://variety.com/2024/digital/news/tiktok-lawsuit-doj-violating-coppa-child-data-privacy-law-1236094254/> (last visited Sep. 26, 2024).

1 of Service, which provides in relevant part: “[y]ou acknowledge and agree that [TikTok] may  
2 generate revenues, increase goodwill or otherwise increase our value from your use of the  
3 [s]ervices, . . . through the sale of advertising, sponsorships, promotions, usage data and  
4 [g]ifts . . .”

5 327. TikTok provides tools for businesses to advertise on its Platform. TikTok offers  
6 various tools through its Business Center, Ad Manager, Creator Marketplace, Business Account,  
7 and TikTok Shop. TikTok sells advertising space to marketers and provides tools that allow  
8 businesses to tailor messages and ads to specific locations. TikTok also offers cross-platform  
9 advertising with Shopify, another e-commerce platform, selling ads for products that are  
10 shoppable on TikTok without Shopify users ever needing to leave the Shopify platform. TikTok  
11 generates substantial and increasing revenue annually by sending targeted advertisements to  
12 users across the United States.

13 328. Users may also purchase “Coins” from TikTok and gift them to other  
14 TikTok users, which can then be exchanged for U.S. fiat currency.

15 329. TikTok also offers users “TikTok Rewards,” a referral rewards program that can  
16 similarly be redeemed for U.S. currency. Users may earn a referral reward when they invite a  
17 new user who creates a TikTok account. Subsequently, both the new and referring users may  
18 earn referral rewards when the new user participates in certain video-watching tasks.

19 330. TikTok encourages and provides tools for users to engage in e-commerce  
20 themselves. “TikTok Shop” allows small businesses and global brands alike to advertise and sell  
21 goods, which users can purchase directly through the Platform.

## 22 **2. TikTok has significant business ties to Washington**

23 331. TikTok has a large office in Washington, which is rapidly expanding. TikTok’s  
24 increasing job postings in Washington confirms its growing presence in the state. As of  
25 September 2024, TikTok was advertising over 900 job openings in the Seattle area.  
26

1 332. TikTok boasts that, in 2023, small and medium sized businesses “use of TikTok  
2 in Washington as an advertisement and marketing platform contributed \$550 million to GDP  
3 and supported 4,400 jobs.”<sup>43</sup>

4 333. With an estimate average of 2.6 million active users in Washington, TikTok nets  
5 an estimated total over [REDACTED] from Washington per month, or [REDACTED] annually.

6 334. Upon information and belief, each of the Defendants has jointly advertised,  
7 marketed, developed, and distributed the TikTok Platform to consumers in Washington since  
8 2017. Upon information and belief, each Defendant has actively formulated, participated in,  
9 approved, directed, or otherwise controlled the acts or practices referenced throughout this  
10 complaint.

11 **V. FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**  
12 **(Deceptive Acts in Violation of the Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.020)**

13 335. The State re-alleges Paragraphs 1 through 334 and incorporates them as if set  
14 forth fully herein.

15 336. TikTok engaged in deceptive acts or practices affecting Washington consumers,  
16 including young users and parents of young users, and in violation of RCW 19.86.020 by:

- 17 1. misrepresenting, directly or indirectly, expressly, by implication, or by omission the  
18 design and impact of its Platform, which TikTok designed to promote extended,  
19 excessive, compulsive, and/or addictive use knowing young users and children are  
20 susceptible to and at risk of harm by such design;
- 21 2. misrepresenting, directly or indirectly, expressly, by implication, or by omission that  
22 its Platform is less addictive and/or less likely to result in psychological and physical  
23 harm for young users than its Platform is in reality;
- 24

25  
26 <sup>43</sup> *TikTok: The Value of the App for Consumers and Business Leaders in Washington*,  
[https://a-us.storyblok.com/f/1018266/x/57321802a2/tiktok\\_factsheet\\_wa.pdf](https://a-us.storyblok.com/f/1018266/x/57321802a2/tiktok_factsheet_wa.pdf) (last visited Sep. 26, 2024)

- 1 3. misrepresenting, directly or indirectly, expressly, by implication, or by omission its  
2 Platform as safe, well-moderated, and appropriate for young users when TikTok  
3 knows its Platform is poorly moderated and its touted safety features do not work as  
4 advertised;
- 5 4. misrepresenting, directly or indirectly, expressly, by implication, or by omission that  
6 it offers effective tools for young users to control their interactions with the Platform,  
7 such as the “Refresh” and “Restricted Mode” features;
- 8 5. misrepresenting, directly or indirectly, expressly, by implication, or by omission,  
9 through the publication of Community Guidelines and omission of material data from  
10 those reports, and through other communications, that the incidence or prevalence of  
11 negative or harmful material on TikTok’s Platform was lower than it actually was;
- 12 6. misrepresenting, directly or indirectly, expressly, by implication, or by omission that  
13 under-13 users are effectively excluded from using the standard version of TikTok’s  
14 Platform when TikTok knows many under-13 users are able to easily bypass its age-  
15 gating system and are on the standard version of its Platform; and
- 16 7. other deceptive representations as set forth in the preceding paragraphs.

17 337. TikTok’s conduct as described herein occurred in trade or commerce within the  
18 meaning of the Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.010(2), directly or indirectly affecting the  
19 people of the State of Washington.

20 338. TikTok’s deceptive acts or practices affected the public interest in that they  
21 impacted numerous Washington consumers and other consumers.

22 339. TikTok’s deceptive acts or practices are likely to continue without relief from this  
23 Court.

24 340. Based on the above deceptive acts or practices, the State is entitled to relief under  
25 the Consumer Protection Act including injunctive relief and restitution pursuant to  
26 RCW 19.86.080, civil penalties pursuant to RCW 19.86.140 for each and every violation of

1 RCW 19.86.020, and reimbursement of the costs of this action, including reasonable attorneys’  
2 fees, pursuant to RCW 19.86.080.

3  
4 **VI. SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION**  
5 **(Unfair Acts in Violation of the Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.020)**

6 341. The State re-alleges Paragraphs 1 through 334 and incorporates them as if set  
7 fully herein.

8 342. TikTok engaged in unfair acts or practices affecting Washington consumers,  
9 including young users and parents of young users, and in violation of RCW 19.86.020 by:

- 10 1. exploiting young users’ and children’s compulsive and unhealthy use of and  
11 addiction to TikTok’s Platform;
- 12 2. downplaying, minimizing, denying, or otherwise ignoring instances of harm suffered  
13 by young users and children on TikTok’s Platform;
- 14 3. downplaying, minimizing, denying, or otherwise ignoring the association between  
15 harms and the use of TikTok’s Platform by young users and children;
- 16 4. targeting its Platform to young users and children while designing its Platform to  
17 include features psychologically and physically harmful to young users and  
18 children—including TikTok-designed and TikTok-deployed features known to  
19 promote compulsive, prolonged, and unhealthy use;
- 20 5. adopting design choices that have the capacity to harm young users, including infinite  
21 scroll, ephemeral content features, autoplay, and disruptive alerts;
- 22 6. designing, developing, and/or deploying disruptive audiovisual and vibration  
23 notifications and alerts and ephemeral features to induce young users and children to  
24 spend more time using the Platform; and
- 25 7. algorithmically exploiting “variable reinforcement schedules,” inducing young users  
26 and children to over-engage with TikTok’s products.



1 specific individuals, groups of individuals, or communities based on demographic  
2 characteristics, including but not limited to age or sex;

3 352. Order Defendants to pay restitution and/or other monetary relief;

4 353. Disgorge Defendants of money, property, or data (including any algorithms  
5 developed using such data) acquired by Defendants as a result of the conduct complained of  
6 herein;

7 354. Award the State the costs of bringing this action, including reasonable attorney's  
8 fees;

9 355. Award prejudgment interest at a rate of 12 percent per annum, pursuant to  
10 RCW 19.52.020;

11 356. Award any other and additional relief as the Court may determine to be just and  
12 proper.

13 DATED this 8th day of October 2024.

14 ROBERT W. FERGUSON  
15 Attorney General

16 *s/ Joseph K. Kanada*

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