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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Demanding Transparency from Apple and Google



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is demanding that Apple and Google provide a means for consumers to identify certain foreign-owned apps—available for download in each company's app stores—so that consumers can make more informed decisions. In a pair of letters sent to the CEOs of the companies today, Attorney General Moody called for the app stores to place designations on foreign-developed or foreign-owned mobile apps from countries that may pose a national security risk, such as China and Russia. The letters follow nationwide calls for action against China-owned app TikTok and the downing of several unidentified objects floating across or near the U.S.—including one confirmed Chinese spy balloon.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “We must ensure that consumers have the information needed to make informed decisions about their data privacy and security. The existing lack of transparency in app stores can create a significant risk for American citizens, and could cause their personal information to be exploited by foreign entities of concern. That is why I am calling on Apple and Google to bring more transparency to their app stores—so consumers know what products are owned or developed by nations that may pose a national security risk.”

In the letters to Apple and Google, Attorney General Moody argues: “Foreign-owned applications such as TikTok, which is owned by Chinese company ByteDance, have been flagged by national security experts as posing a risk to both privacy and user information. In addition to data collection and unauthorized access concerns, such apps may also pose undue risks to users due to algorithmic recommendations, which can be used to carry out influence operations. Consumers cannot be expected to be aware of such risks without disclosure. Other entities, such as Russian-headquartered software company, Pushwoosh, developed code that was found in thousands of apps in both Apple and Google’s online stores, and which were downloaded and used by the U.S. military and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Further, it is

alarming that out of the top apps in Apple's App Store [and Google's Play Store], the top three are China-based, thus equating to hundreds of millions of downloads domestically and billions worldwide."

The letter states that adding a designation for certain foreign-developed and foreign-owned mobile apps would help consumer awareness prior to downloading an app.

To read the letter to Apple's CEO, click here.

To read the letter to Google's CEO, click here.