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[EXEMPT FROM FILING FEES  
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CODE SECTION 6103]

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11  
12 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
13 FOR THE COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA

14  
15  
16 **THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF**  
17 **CALIFORNIA,**  
18 Plaintiff,  
19 v.  
20 **TIKTOK INC.;**  
21 **TIKTOK U.S. DATA SECURITY INC.;**  
22 **TIKTOK LLC;**  
23 **TIKTOK PTE. LTD;**  
24 **TIKTOK LTD;**  
25 **BYTEDANCE INC.;**  
26 **BYTEDANCE LTD; and**  
27 **DOES 1 through 100, inclusive,**  
28 Defendants.

Case No.  
**COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE AND  
OTHER RELIEF**  
(BUS. & PROF. CODE, §§ 17200 et seq.,  
17500 et seq.)  
**Public – Redacted materials from  
conditionally sealed record**  
[VERIFIED ANSWER REQUIRED  
PURSUANT TO CALIFORNIA CODE OF  
CIVIL PROCEDURE SECTION 446]

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1 Plaintiff, the People of the State of California (“Plaintiff” or the “People”), by and through  
2 Rob Bonta, Attorney General of the State of California, alleges the following on information and  
3 belief:

4 **TIKTOK EXPLOITS AND HARMS YOUNG USERS AND DECEIVES THE PUBLIC**  
5 **ABOUT ITS PLATFORM AND PLATFORM’S DANGERS**

6 1. For the past several years, TikTok, Inc., along with its parent and affiliate entities  
7 named as Defendants in this action (collectively, “Defendants” or “TikTok”), has designed and  
8 operated a social media platform intended to be addictive, and which is severely harmful to the  
9 physical and psychological well-being of young users. TikTok preys on young people’s unique  
10 psychological vulnerabilities through an arsenal of harmful, addictive-by-design features that it  
11 targets to exploit and manipulate young users’ developing brains. TikTok profits by doing so,  
12 because TikTok’s business model is based on maximizing users’ engagement with its platform,  
13 including the amount of time users spend on the platform. Maximizing user engagement enables  
14 TikTok to better target advertising space on its platform and maximize revenue through sales of  
15 advertising space.

16 2. TikTok knows that the harmful effects of its platform wreak havoc on the mental  
17 health of children and teenagers throughout California and the United States. Its executives admit:

18 [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]

22 3. Despite knowing that it implemented what it referred to internally as “[REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]” and knowing the risk of serious harm to youth, including sleep deprivation,  
24 depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide, and death, TikTok engages in a coordinated scheme to  
25 deceptively market the TikTok platform as safe, well-moderated, and appropriate for young users.  
26 The collective public narrative TikTok creates through a variety of acts, practices and  
27 representations misleads the public as to how the platform actually operates and its negative  
28 impact on young users’ wellbeing.

1           4.           Outside the United States, TikTok’s parent company, Defendant ByteDance Ltd.,  
2 actively strives to protect some children from such harms by, for example, providing a different  
3 version of TikTok that reduces harm to minors (users under 18 years old, also known as “young  
4 users”). TikTok has every ability to take similar measures to protect young users here.

5           5.           But TikTok chooses not to, and in California and throughout the United States, it  
6 specifically targets children (under 13 years old) and teenagers (aged 13 to 17) with a platform  
7 designed to keep these young users engaged as long as possible. TikTok’s executives and  
8 employees admit that they target young Americans, stating:

- 9           a.           “It’s better to have young people as an early adopter, especially the teenagers in the  
10           U.S. Why? They [*sic*] got a lot of time.”<sup>1</sup>
- 11           b.           “Teenagers in the U.S. are a golden audience . . . . If you look at China, the teenage  
12           culture doesn’t exist — the teens are super busy in school studying for tests, so they  
13           don’t have the time and luxury to play social media apps.”<sup>2</sup>

14           6.           Along with targeting youth and investing substantial resources to keep young users  
15 on the TikTok platform in order to maximize advertising revenue, TikTok has disregarded  
16 children’s privacy online and even failed to comply with federal statutory and regulatory  
17 requirements protecting children’s privacy. TikTok has actual knowledge that it collects data  
18 about children under age 13, and TikTok knows its platform is directed to children. Yet, TikTok  
19 does not obtain the required verifiable parental consent before collecting, using, or disclosing the  
20 personal information of its child users, nor does TikTok provide the required notice to parents  
21 before collecting children’s data.

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25           <sup>1</sup> See Andrew Brown, *Musical.ly’s Alex Zhu on Igniting Viral Growth and Building a*  
26 *User Community 2016* at 5:01, YOUTUBE (Feb. 17, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7y971yL5dE> [[web.archive.org/web/20240918213447/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Db7y971yL5dE](https://web.archive.org/web/20240918213447/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Db7y971yL5dE)].

27           <sup>2</sup> Paul Mozur, *Chinese Tech Firms Forced to Choose Market: Home or Everywhere Else*,  
28 N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 9, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/10/technology/china-homegrown-internet-companies-rest-of-the-world.html>.



1           13.       Defendant TikTok, Ltd. is a company incorporated in the Cayman Islands with its  
2 principal place of business in Singapore or Beijing, China. Defendant TikTok, Ltd. wholly owns  
3 Defendant TikTok LLC and Defendant TikTok Pte. Ltd.

4           14.       Defendant ByteDance Inc. is a Delaware corporation with its principal place of  
5 business at 1199 Coleman Avenue, San Jose, California 95110.

6           15.       Defendant ByteDance Ltd. is the ultimate parent company of all other Defendants.  
7 It is a company incorporated in the Cayman Islands with its principal place of business in Beijing,  
8 China.

9           16.       The defendants identified in Paragraphs 9 through 15 above are referred to  
10 collectively in this Complaint as “Defendants” or “TikTok.”

11          17.       Defendants DOES 1 through 100, inclusive, are sued herein under fictitious  
12 names. Their true names and capacities, whether individual, corporate, associate or otherwise, are  
13 unknown to the Plaintiff. When their true names and capacities are ascertained, Plaintiff will  
14 amend this complaint by inserting their true names and capacities herein. Plaintiff is informed and  
15 believes and thereon alleges that each of the fictitiously named defendants is responsible in some  
16 manner or liable for the unlawful acts or omissions herein alleged.

17 **I.    DEFENDANTS JOINTLY OPERATE TIKTOK AS A COMMON ENTERPRISE.**

18          18.       Defendants are all intimately involved in operating the TikTok platform. For  
19 example, ByteDance Ltd. and TikTok Ltd. are intimately involved in making decisions about the  
20 TikTok platform, even though TikTok is unavailable in China. ByteDance Ltd. and TikTok Ltd.  
21 even retain authority to approve or deny implementation of TikTok’s “safety features.”

22          19.       A group of ByteDance Ltd. and TikTok Inc. executives, including Zhang Yiming,  
23 Liang Rubo, Zhao Penyuan, and Zhu Wenjia, direct and control TikTok’s core features and  
24 development.

25          20.       Moreover, Defendants operate on a “shared services” model, in which ByteDance  
26 Ltd. provides legal, safety, and privacy resources, including personnel.

27          21.       As part of Defendants’ shared services model, ByteDance Ltd. controls legal  
28 compliance and oversight at TikTok Inc. ByteDance Ltd.’s Global General Counsel, who reports

1 to ByteDance Ltd.'s CEO, also oversees TikTok Inc.'s legal issues.<sup>4</sup> For example, ByteDance's  
2 Director of Legal Affairs was [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 22. Similarly, ByteDance Ltd. controls TikTok Inc.'s e-commerce operations, and  
7 leadership of TikTok Inc.'s e-commerce operations reports directly to ByteDance Ltd.'s  
8 executives rather than TikTok Inc.'s own CEO.<sup>5</sup> Further, TikTok Inc.'s head of human resources  
9 reports to ByteDance Ltd.'s head of human resources.

10 23. Additionally, upon information and belief, Defendants have one centralized bank  
11 account for ByteDance Ltd.'s more than a dozen products, including TikTok.

12 24. ByteDance Ltd. also created the TikTok algorithm and maintains ownership over  
13 it.<sup>6</sup>

14 25. ByteDance Ltd. and TikTok Ltd. employees also routinely sign contracts on behalf  
15 of TikTok Inc.

16 26. Further, TikTok Ltd. is listed as the TikTok platform's developer, and TikTok Pte.  
17 Ltd. as the TikTok platform's seller, on the Apple App Store.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the TikTok platform's  
18  
19

20 <sup>4</sup> *ByteDance Appoints John Rogovin as Global General Counsel*, TIKTOK (June 3, 2024),  
21 <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/bytedance-appoints-john-rogovin-as-global-general-counsel>  
22 [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240920214718/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/bytedance-appoints-john-rogovin-as-global-general-counsel>].

23 <sup>5</sup> See Juro Osawa, *TikTok's E-Commerce Management Structure Undercuts Claims of*  
24 *Autonomy From China*, THE INFORMATION (Jan. 17, 2023), [https://www.theinformation.com/](https://www.theinformation.com/articles/tiktoks-e-commerce-management-structure-undercuts-claims-of-autonomy-from-china)  
25 [articles/tiktoks-e-commerce-management-structure-undercuts-claims-of-autonomy-from-china](https://www.theinformation.com/articles/tiktoks-e-commerce-management-structure-undercuts-claims-of-autonomy-from-china)  
26 (“Sandie Hawkins, a U.S.-based TikTok executive who became the app’s head of U.S. e-  
27 commerce in November [2022], reports to Bob Kang, ByteDance’s e-commerce chief, who in  
28 turn reports to Zhang Lidong, ByteDance’s China chair based on Beijing . . . . But neither  
Hawkins nor Kang reports to TikTok’s CEO . . .”)

<sup>6</sup> Emily Baker-White, *As TikTok Ban Looms, ByteDance Battles Oracle for Control of Its*  
26 *Algorithm*, FORBES (Aug. 24, 2023), [https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/](https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2023/08/24/tiktok-ban-oracle-bytedance-algorithm-fight)  
27 [2023/08/24/tiktok-ban-oracle-bytedance-algorithm-fight](https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2023/08/24/tiktok-ban-oracle-bytedance-algorithm-fight).

<sup>7</sup> *TikTok*, APPLE APP STORE, <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/tiktok/id835599320>  
28 [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240920222508/https://apps.apple.com/us/app/tiktok/](https://web.archive.org/web/20240920222508/https://apps.apple.com/us/app/tiktok/id835599320)  
[id835599320](https://web.archive.org/web/20240920222508/https://apps.apple.com/us/app/tiktok/id835599320)].



1 listing on Google Play provides TikTok Pte. Ltd. as the entity responsible for the app.<sup>8</sup> The  
2 tiktok.com domain is also registered to TikTok Ltd.

3 27. Employee roles among Defendants are often blurred: TikTok Inc. represents that it  
4 has not created or maintained an organizational chart because its employees do not have formal  
5 titles and the responsibilities between organizations are fluid.<sup>9</sup> Some former employees have  
6 even stated they were unsure which Defendant they actually worked for.

7 28. Prominent leaders of TikTok Inc. even state on their public LinkedIn profiles that  
8 they are employed by “ByteDance/TikTok.”<sup>10</sup>

9 29. Indeed, in April 2021, when Shou Chew was named CEO of TikTok Inc., he was  
10 serving as CFO of ByteDance Ltd.<sup>11</sup> As CEO of TikTok Inc., Chew reports to the CEO of  
11 ByteDance Ltd and is also paid by ByteDance Ltd.<sup>12</sup>

12 30. Because Defendants’ corporate boundaries are porous, employees at all the  
13 companies work together. For example, all Defendants’ employees use a shared internal  
14 messaging system, Lark, where they can engage in chats and group chats with each other  
15 regardless of their formal company affiliation.<sup>13</sup> Defendants’ employees use Lark to discuss  
16 specific features on the TikTok platform.

17  
18 <sup>8</sup> *TikTok*, GOOGLE PLAY STORE, [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.zhiliaoapp.musically&hl=en\\_US&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.zhiliaoapp.musically&hl=en_US&gl=US) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240920223421/https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.zhiliaoapp.musically&hl=en\\_US&gl=US](https://web.archive.org/web/20240920223421/https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.zhiliaoapp.musically&hl=en_US&gl=US)].

19 <sup>9</sup> See Roger Chen & Rui Ma, *How ByteDance Became the World’s Most Valuable Startup*,  
20 HARV. BUS. REV. (Feb. 24, 2022), <https://hbr.org/2022/02/how-bytedance-became-the-worlds-most-valuable-startup>.

21 <sup>10</sup> Rachel Lee et al., *TikTok, ByteDance, and Their Ties to the Chinese Communist Party*,  
22 Submission to Australian Senate Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media,  
42 (March 14, 2023), <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=a7e2a076-1112-4414-ba0f-f129e0cd39fe&subId=735418>.

23 <sup>11</sup> *TikTok Names CEO and COO*, TIKTOK (Apr. 30, 2021),  
24 <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktok-names-ceo-and-coo>  
25 [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240927215624/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktok-names-ceo-and-coo>]; Ryan Mac & Chang Che, *TikTok’s C.E.O. Navigates the Limits of His Power*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 16, 2022),  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/technology/tiktok-ceo-shou-zi-chew.html>.

26 <sup>12</sup> See *TikTok: How Congress Can Safeguard American Data Privacy and Protect*  
27 *Children from Online Harms Before H. Comm. on Energy and Commerce*, 118th Cong. 28, 24,  
95-96 (2023) (statement of Shou Chew, Chief Executive Officer, TikTok Inc.) (hereinafter Chew  
28 Congressional Statement).

<sup>13</sup> Sapna Maheshwari & Ryan Mac, *Driver’s Licenses, Addresses, Photos: Inside How*

(continued...)

1           31.       TikTok Inc. CEO Chew stated to Congress on March 23, 2023 that employees of  
2 ByteDance Ltd. work on the TikTok platform and that he personally uses Lark to communicate  
3 “with employees at ByteDance [Ltd.]”<sup>14</sup>

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

9           33.       This report also gives examples of cross-hiring among Defendants. For example,  
10 in November 2022, TikTok Inc. posted a job for a “data scientist” based in Shanghai. The next  
11 week, ByteDance Ltd. posted a job advertisement with the same description. The hiring team for  
12 the ByteDance Ltd. position worked for “TikTok.”<sup>16</sup>

13           34.       The same report concluded that ByteDance Ltd. management considers the entities  
14 interchangeable.<sup>17</sup>

15           35.       Each Defendant has actively formulated, participated in, approved, directed, or  
16 otherwise controlled the acts or practices referenced throughout this complaint.

17           36.       At all relevant times, each Defendant acted individually and jointly with every  
18 other named Defendant in committing all acts alleged in this Complaint.

19           37.       At all relevant times, each Defendant acted: (a) as a principal; (b) under express or  
20 implied agency; and/or (c) with actual or ostensible authority to perform the acts alleged in this  
21 Complaint on behalf of every other named Defendant.

22           38.       At all relevant times, some or all Defendants acted as the agent of the others, and  
23 all Defendants acted within the scope of their agency if acting as an agent of another.

24  
25  
26 

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*TikTok Shares User Data*, N.Y. TIMES (May 24, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/24/technology/inside-how-tiktok-shares-user-data-lark.html>.

27 <sup>14</sup> Chew Congressional Statement, *supra* note 12 at 36, 96.

28 <sup>15</sup> Lee, *supra* note 10, at 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *See id.*





1 businesses, so as to render the exercise of jurisdiction over Defendants by the California courts  
2 consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

3 48. All Defendants together operate as a common enterprise, including while engaging  
4 in the unfair, deceptive, and other unlawful acts and practices alleged below. Because Defendants  
5 have operated as a common enterprise, such that agency and/or alter-ego relationships have  
6 formed, this Court has jurisdiction over each Defendant.

7 49. The violations of law alleged in this Complaint occurred in the County of Santa  
8 Clara and elsewhere throughout California.

9 50. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 393,  
10 subdivision (a), because violations of law that occurred in the County of Santa Clara are a “part of  
11 the cause” upon which the Plaintiff seeks the recovery of penalties imposed by statute.

12 51. Venue is also proper in this Court pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section  
13 395.5 because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims alleged  
14 occurred in this County, a large number of young users harmed by TikTok’s acts or omissions  
15 reside in Santa Clara County, and therefore Defendants’ liability arises in the County of Santa  
16 Clara.

## 17 **RELEVANT TIMES**

18 52. TikTok’s violations of the UCL and FAL are ongoing. The illegal conduct began  
19 at a time unknown to the Plaintiff but no later than 2017, and such conduct has continued through  
20 the present. This action is timely brought pursuant to the Tolling Agreement, originally executed  
21 by TikTok’s counsel on July 29, 2022, which tolls all claims ripe as of March 2, 2022, and which  
22 terminated on June 1, 2024.

## 23 **DEFENDANTS’ BUSINESS ACTS AND PRACTICES**

### 24 **I. TIKTOK’S BUSINESS MODEL COERCIVELY MAXIMIZES THE TIME YOUNG USERS 25 SPEND ENGAGING WITH THE TIKTOK PLATFORM.**

26 53. TikTok’s business model is based on maximizing users’ engagement with the  
27 TikTok platform, as measured by the amount of time the user spends on the platform and other  
28 indicia, like the number of times (and times of day) a user opens the platform, whether a user

1 allows a video to play to completion or swipes to another screen, whether a user clicks “Like” or  
2 “Share” buttons, etc. As described in Section II.A. below, TikTok employs what it refers to as  
3 “██████████” to induce excessive, compulsive and addictive use that maximizes users’  
4 engagement.

5 54. TikTok’s primary source of income is advertising revenue, earned by showing  
6 third-party advertisements to users on its platform.<sup>22</sup> The advertisements take many forms,  
7 including full-screen ads that play when users first open the platform, in-feed ads that appear  
8 intermittently between non-advertisements, branded hashtag challenges, branded filters, and  
9 video-editing effects.<sup>23</sup>

10 55. The more user data TikTok collects, the better targeted advertising space it can  
11 sell, which increases its revenue.<sup>24</sup> TikTok has thus designed a business model in which it is  
12 incentivized to increase user engagement. And TikTok pursues that goal through means that  
13 promote excessive, compulsive and addictive use, as well as other harms.

14 56. Further, TikTok targets young users with its “██████████” to maximize  
15 the business model’s success.

16 **A. Since it entered the United States market, TikTok focused on acquiring**  
17 **and exploiting young users and their data.**

18 57. ByteDance Ltd. entered the American market in December 2017 by acquiring  
19 Musical.ly, a popular social media app launched in 2014 that allowed users to create and post  
20 short videos of themselves lip-syncing and dancing to popular songs.<sup>25</sup> At the time, ByteDance

21 <sup>22</sup> See Lydia Kibit, *How Does TikTok Make Money?*, GOBANKINGRATES (Apr. 23, 2021),  
22 <https://www.gobankingrates.com/money/business/how-does-tiktok-make-money>.

23 <sup>23</sup> See Abi Travis, *TikTok Is a Free App, So How Does It Make Money?*, DISTRACTIFY  
24 (Aug. 5, 2020), <https://www.distractify.com/p/how-does-tiktok-make-money>; *Branded Effect: Play Your Brand Center Stage*, TIKTOK (July 13, 2021), [https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/branded-effect-place-your-brand-center-stage?ab\\_version=control](https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/branded-effect-place-your-brand-center-stage?ab_version=control) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240924172334/https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/branded-effect-place-your-brand-center-stage?ab\\_version=control](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924172334/https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/branded-effect-place-your-brand-center-stage?ab_version=control)].

25 <sup>24</sup> See Zheping Huang, *TikTok Has a Few Main Ingredients for Making Money*,  
26 BLOOMBERG (June 28, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-06-28/how-does-tiktok-make-money-app-relies-on-a-few-main-ingredients> (noting that TikTok’s algorithm helps it serve “more appealing ads and triple its ad revenue”).

27 <sup>25</sup> See Paul Mozur, *Musical.ly, a Chinese App Big in the U.S., Sells for \$1 Billion*, N.Y.  
28 TIMES (Nov. 10, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/business/dealbook/musically-sold-app-video.html>.

1 Ltd. paid approximately \$1 billion to acquire Musical.ly and the accounts and content of its  
2 millions of users.<sup>26</sup> Musical.ly’s wholly owned subsidiary, Musical.ly, Inc., was a California  
3 corporation with its principal place of business in Santa Monica, California.

4 58. Musical.ly was particularly popular with American teens,<sup>27</sup> and it had at least 60  
5 million mostly U.S. users,<sup>28</sup> with a significant percentage of them children under age 13.<sup>29</sup>

6 59. To register for the Musical.ly app, users provided their email address, phone  
7 number, username, first and last name, a short biography, and a profile picture. Between  
8 December 2015 and October 2016, Musical.ly also collected geolocation information from users  
9 of the app.<sup>30</sup> Before July 2017, Musical.ly did not require users to enter their age when creating  
10 an account. Musical.ly never requested age information for existing users who created accounts  
11 prior to July 2017. “A significant percentage of Musical.ly users [were] children under 13, and  
12 numerous press articles between 2016 and 2018 highlight the popularity of the App among  
13 tweens and younger children.”<sup>31</sup>

14 60. In August 2018, ByteDance Ltd. merged the Musical.ly app with the TikTok app  
15 and began operating as TikTok.<sup>32</sup>

16 61. Shortly thereafter in February 2019, Musical.ly—which, by that time, was known  
17 and operating as TikTok—paid the FTC \$5.7 million to settle allegations that Musical.ly violated  
18 the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) by illegally collecting and using personal  
19 information from children without parental consent.<sup>33</sup>

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20  
21 <sup>26</sup> See *id.*

22 <sup>27</sup> See Paresh Dave, *China’s ByteDance Scrubs Musical.ly Brand in Favor of TikTok*,  
REUTERS (Aug. 2, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ByteDance-musically/chinas-ByteDance-scrubs-musical-ly-brand-in-favor-of-tiktok-idUSKBN1KN0BW>.

23 <sup>28</sup> See Jon Russell & Katie Roof, *China’s Bytedance Is Buying Musical.ly in a Deal Worth*  
*\$800M-\$1B*, TECHCRUNCH (Nov. 9, 2017), <https://techcrunch.com/2017/11/09/chinas-toutiao-is-buying-musical-ly-in-a-deal-worth-800m-1b>.

24 <sup>29</sup> See Complaint ¶¶ 12–23, *United States v. Musical.ly, et al.*, No. 2:19-cv-1439 (C.D.  
25 Cal. Feb. 27, 2019) (hereinafter Musical.ly Complaint).

26 <sup>30</sup> *Id.* at ¶ 13.

27 <sup>31</sup> See *id.* at ¶¶ 12–23.

28 <sup>32</sup> See *id.* at ¶ 23; see also Dave, *supra* note 27.

29 <sup>33</sup> See Press Release, Fed. Trade Comm’n, Video Social Networking App Musical.ly  
Agrees to Settle FTC Allegations That it Violated Children’s Privacy Law (Feb. 27, 2019),  
<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2019/02/video-social-networking-app-musically-agrees-settle-ftc-allegations-it-violated-childrens-privacy>.





1 67. TikTok’s internal data [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 68. In 2023, 63% of all Americans aged 13 to 17 who responded to a Pew Research  
16 survey reported using TikTok, and most teenagers in the U.S. were using TikTok daily; 17% of  
17 American teens said that they were on TikTok “almost constantly.”<sup>34</sup>

18 **II. TIKTOK UNFAIRLY HARMS YOUNG USERS THROUGH ITS INTENTIONALLY ADDICTIVE**  
19 **PLATFORM AND THROUGH HARMFUL BEAUTY FILTERS.**

20 69. TikTok designs and deploys exploitative and manipulative features to addict  
21 young users and maximize their time on its platform. This is not an accidental byproduct of its  
22 efforts to grow its base of young users and increase its advertising revenues. Rather, addicting  
23 young users to its platform is a central pillar in its growth strategy—and one that TikTok has  
24 doggedly pursued notwithstanding the harm to those young users.

25

26

27 <sup>34</sup> See Monica Anderson, et al., *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023*, PEW  
28 RESEARCH CTR. (Dec. 11, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/>.

1           70.       TikTok designed its platform to capture as much of its users’ time and attention as  
2 possible, and it admits that [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED] The more time users spend on the platform, the more ads they watch,  
4 which increases TikTok’s ad revenue. TikTok has long prioritized maximizing the amount of  
5 time that teenagers spend on its platform. *The New York Times* reported that TikTok’s success  
6 largely comes from the significant amount of time users spend on the platform: “TikTok’s users  
7 spend an average of 96 minutes a day on the app—nearly five times what they spend on  
8 Snapchat, triple their time on Twitter, and almost twice as much as their time on Facebook and  
9 Instagram.” Rich Greenfield, a technology analyst quoted in the article, stated: “TikTok is eating  
10 the world. The only thing that matters in the world of entertainment is time spent.”<sup>35</sup>

11           71.       TikTok’s internal documents [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]

14           72.       Interviews of TikTok employees [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]. For  
16 example, [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED] An internal document  
19 also [REDACTED]

20           73.       A report from “TikTank,” an internal TikTok research group, [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED] The report also [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]

25           74.       In particular, TikTok has long prioritized maximizing the amount of time that  
26 young users spend on its platform. Internal TikTok documents note that [REDACTED]

27 \_\_\_\_\_  
28 <sup>35</sup> Kalley Huang et al., *TikTok Builds Itself Into an Ads Juggernaut*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 14, 2022), [www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/technology/tiktok-ads-social-media.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/technology/tiktok-ads-social-media.html).

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

75. TikTok conducts [REDACTED]. It has found that

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

76. TikTok optimizes its platform for maximum use by young people. It tracks metrics to measure its success, such as: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TikTok uses this information to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

77. TikTok also targets Californian and other American children under the age of thirteen with its “Kids Mode” version of the platform.

78. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

79. [REDACTED] TikTok expressly stated that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

80. TikTok’s efforts to maximize usage of its platform by Californian teenagers and children have been extremely successful. The TikTok app is now American teens’ “primary social app of choice.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See Andrew Hutchinson, *New Survey Underlines TikTok’s Popularity with Teen Users*, SOC. MED. TODAY (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/Survey-Underlines-TikToks-Popularity-with-Teens/635961>.

1           **A. TikTok designed its platform to promote excessive, compulsive, and**  
2           **addictive use.**

3           81.       TikTok created platform features intended to cause excessive, compulsive, and  
4           addictive use. For young users of the TikTok platform, the features’ impacts are severe, and  
5           include increased levels of depression and anxiety disorders, reduced sleep, self-harm, suicidal  
6           ideation, and eating disorders.

7           82.       TikTok’s algorithms and design decisions are intended to cause young users to  
8           compulsively spend increasing amounts of time on the platform. TikTok outfitted its platform  
9           with features that its own employees describe as “ [REDACTED]  
10          [REDACTED] who TikTok employees also acknowledge, “[REDACTED]  
11          [REDACTED]”

12          83.       TikTok’s design choices exploit the neurotransmitter dopamine, which helps  
13          humans feel pleasure as part of the brain’s reward system to encourage reinforcement. Dopamine  
14          “rewards” can lead to addictive behavior, particularly when rewards are unpredictable.

15          84.       Unpredictably delivered dopamine hits, known as “variable rewards,” are  
16          particularly effective at influencing human behavior. A report about persuasive design called  
17          *Disrupted Childhood* [REDACTED]  
18          [REDACTED]

19          explained how variable rewards produce dopamine rushes:

20               Variable rewards hold a special thrill, as the user anticipates a reward that they know  
21               could come but is tantalisingly just out of reach. A gambler waiting to see where the  
22               roulette wheel will stop or a viewer watching a presenter’s dramatic pause before they  
23               announce a winner. In both cases, the individuals experience a dopamine rush as they  
24               anticipate the unknown outcome.<sup>37</sup>

25  
26  
27               \_\_\_\_\_  
28               <sup>37</sup> See BARONESS KIDRON, ET AL., *DISRUPTED CHILDHOOD: THE COST OF PERSUASIVE*  
*DESIGN* 20 (June 2018).

1 85. The anticipation of the reward, not just the reward itself, drives compulsive and  
2 unhealthy habit formation.<sup>38</sup> [REDACTED] “[o]nce the reward has been absorbed, the  
3 dopamine fades leaving the desire for more.”<sup>39</sup>

4 86. TikTok successfully harnesses this well-researched method to fuel excessive,  
5 compulsive, and addictive use of its platform, while knowing that the prospect of an  
6 *unpredictable* dopamine “reward”<sup>40</sup> is even more addicting than consistent dopamine “rewards.”

7 87. To that end, the platform deploys variable rewards to its users. Some of the  
8 features that deliver these variable rewards, such as push notifications and the recommendation  
9 system, are described below. Younger users of the platform find it especially difficult “to ignore  
10 the prospect of a dopamine reward, even when this conflicts with other essential daily activities,  
11 such as sleeping or eating.”<sup>41</sup>

12 88. TikTok knows that minors are particularly susceptible to compulsive use of its  
13 platform. A TikTok-commissioned report corroborates that young developing brains are  
14 vulnerable to harmful addictive behaviors:

15 [I]f adapting to physical changes poses a new set of challenges to the developing  
16 young person, the rapid development of the brain brings additional and perhaps  
17 greater ones. In healthy development, the Limbic system of the brain (which regulates  
18 emotion and feelings of reward) undergoes dramatic changes between [the] ages of  
19 10-12 years. These changes then interact with the pre-frontal cortex of the brain (the  
20 judgement centres) to promote novelty seeking behaviour, risk-taking and interactions  
21 with peers. In simple terms, this means there is a phase of intense emotion, whilst  
22 judgment can appear to be less acute, as those ‘judgement centres’ of the brain are  
23 being revised. . . . [UNICEF] describes early adolescence as a time of rapid learning

22 <sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Christopher D. Fiorillo, et al., *Discrete Coding of Reward Probability and*  
23 *Uncertainty by Dopamine Neurons*, 299 SCI. 1898 (2003); Jakob Linnet, *Neurobiological*  
24 *Underpinnings of Reward Anticipation and Outcome Evaluation in Gambling Disorder*, 8  
FRONTIERS BEHAV. NEUROSCIENCE 100 (2014); Ruth J. van Holst et al., *Distorted expectancy*  
25 *coding in problem gaming: is the addictive in the anticipation?*, 71 BIOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY 741  
(2012).

26 <sup>39</sup> See KIDRON, *supra* note 37.

27 <sup>40</sup> See Stephanie Watson, *Dopamine: The Pathway to Pleasure*, HARV. MED. SCH. (Apr.  
28 18, 2024), <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/dopamine-the-pathway-to-pleasure>  
[<https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/dopamine-the-pathway-to-pleasure>].

<sup>41</sup> See KIDRON, *supra* note 37, at 20 n. 67 (citing Ben Carter et al., *Association between*  
*portable screen-based media device access or use and sleep outcomes*, 170 JAMA PEDIATRICS  
12, 1202–08 (2016).

1 and brain development, which facilitates increases in sensation-seeking, motivation  
2 for social relations and sensitivity to social evaluation[.]<sup>42</sup>

3 89. As the *Disrupted Childhood* report found, “[c]hildren’s predilection to seek  
4 immediate gratification makes them particularly susceptible to habit-forming rewards”<sup>43</sup>—a  
5 susceptibility that TikTok exploits for greater profits.<sup>44</sup>

6 90. The unpredictable “rewards” that the TikTok platform provides—such as “Likes”  
7 (received when a user clicks a heart-shaped button on a video); “follows” (a user’s decision to  
8 “follow” another user’s account); and “comments” (user comments to posts on the platform)—are  
9 social rewards. TikTok knows [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED] TikTok leverages this sensitivity and  
11 doles out social rewards to keep young users on its platform for longer periods of time.

12 91. Minors are susceptible to becoming addicted to the TikTok platform because  
13 younger brains have not had as much time to develop as those of adults. TikTok takes advantage  
14 of this vulnerability, [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED] And creating this addiction is TikTok’s goal. Internal presentations note that [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED] One of TikTok’s internal goals  
19 in 2020 was to [REDACTED].

22 <sup>42</sup> ZOE HILTON ET AL., EXPLORING EFFECTIVE PREVENTION EDUCATION RESPONSES TO  
23 DANGEROUS ONLINE CHALLENGES (Praesidio Safeguarding, Nov. 2021),  
24 [https://praesidiosafeguarding.co.uk/safe-guarding/uploads/2021/11/Exploring-effective-  
prevention-education-responses-to-dangerous-online-challenges-English-UK-compressed-1.pdf](https://praesidiosafeguarding.co.uk/safe-guarding/uploads/2021/11/Exploring-effective-prevention-education-responses-to-dangerous-online-challenges-English-UK-compressed-1.pdf)  
25 [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240923223930/  
https%3A%2F%2Fpraesidiosafeguarding.co.uk%2Fsafe-guarding%2Fuploads%2F2021%2F11%  
26 2FExploring-effective-prevention-education-responses-to-dangerous-online-challenges-English-  
UK-compressed-1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20240923223930/https%3A%2F%2Fpraesidiosafeguarding.co.uk%2Fsafe-guarding%2Fuploads%2F2021%2F11%2FExploring-effective-prevention-education-responses-to-dangerous-online-challenges-English-UK-compressed-1.pdf)].

26 <sup>43</sup> See KIDRON, *supra* note 37, at 20.

27 <sup>44</sup> See Mansoor Iqbal, *TikTok Revenue and Usage Statistics (2024)*, BUS. OF APPS (Feb.  
28 22, 2024), [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240228170624/https://www.businessofapps.com/  
data/tik-tok-statistics](https://web.archive.org/web/20240228170624/https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tik-tok-statistics)] (showing TikTok generated an estimated \$9.64 billion revenue in 2022 by  
increasing the time that young users spend on the app).

1                   **1. TikTok intended its “recommendation system” to induce excessive,**  
2                   **compulsive, and addictive use by recommending an endless stream of**  
3                   **content to users.**

4                   92.       The central feature of the TikTok platform is its “recommendation system,” which  
5                   is a complex series of algorithms that powers the “For You feed.” As, TikTok CEO Shou Chew  
6                   said “it’s just math, that’s it.”<sup>45</sup> The For You feed provides users with a stream of videos that  
7                   TikTok’s recommendation system calculates will keep users on the platform. And it works. One  
8                   internal document [REDACTED] notes, [REDACTED]  
9                   [REDACTED]  
10                  [REDACTED]”

11                 93.       TikTok’s For You feed recommendation system is, in large part, composed of the  
12                 following: [REDACTED]  
13                 [REDACTED]  
14                 [REDACTED]  
15                 [REDACTED]  
16                 [REDACTED]  
17                 [REDACTED]  
18                 [REDACTED]

19                 94.       TikTok’s recommendation system is content-agnostic. In TikTok’s own words, the  
20                 system is “[REDACTED].” Multiple internal documents [REDACTED]  
21                 [REDACTED].

22                 95.       The recommendation system processes how users respond to what they view on  
23                 the platform—[REDACTED]—and  
24                 calculates more videos with the goal to keep users on the platform for longer periods. The  
25                 engineers who designed and implemented the recommendation system programmed it to  
26                 maximize time spent on TikTok.

27                   \_\_\_\_\_  
28                 <sup>45</sup> *TikTok C.E.O. Shou Chew on China, the Algorithm and More*, New York Times  
Dealbook Summit (December 1, 2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE5Pcz99JFI>.

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

3 [REDACTED]  
4           97.       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  
11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]

16                   **2.   TikTok uses multiple features to manipulate young users into**  
17                   **compulsive and excessive use.**

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

22                                   **(1)   Effects**

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





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

5           106.     Endless scrolling compels young users to spend more time on the platform by  
6 making it difficult to disengage.<sup>46</sup> It strips away a natural stopping point or opportunity to turn to  
7 a new activity.<sup>47</sup> This perpetual stream is designed to “keep [users] scrolling, and purposely  
8 eliminate any reason for [them] to pause, reconsider or leave.”<sup>48</sup> The user’s experience is a  
9 bottomless “flow state” that fully immerses users, distorts their perception of time, and has been  
10 shown to be associated with problematic use of social media platforms.<sup>49</sup> TikTok knows that

11 [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]

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

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

18           108.     TikTok Stories allows users to post short videos that vanish after 24 hours. By  
19 design, this rapidly disappearing content pressures young users to check the TikTok platform

20 \_\_\_\_\_  
21 <sup>46</sup> See *Why We Can’t Stop Scrolling*, GCFGLOBAL, <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/why-we-cant-stop-scrolling/1> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240927023532/https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/why-we-cant-stop-scrolling/1/>].

22 <sup>47</sup> See *id.*

23 <sup>48</sup> See Von Tristan Harris, *The Slot Machine In Your Pocket*, SPIEGEL INT’L (July 27, 2016), <https://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/smartphone-addiction-is-part-of-the-design-a-1104237.html>.

24 <sup>49</sup> See Nino Gugushvili, et al., *Facebook Use Intensity and Depressive Symptoms: A Moderated Mediation Model of Problematic Facebook Use, Age, Neuroticism, and Extraversion*, 10 BMC PSYCH. 1, 3 (Nov. 28, 2022); Christopher L. Heffner, *Doomscrolling: The Ultimate Negative Flow State and Four Ways to Counter It*, ALLPSYCH (Nov. 26, 2022), <https://allpsych.com/doomscrolling-the-ultimate-negative-flow-state>; Hannah Jantos, *The Psychology of TikTok: Why You Can’t Stop Scrolling*, SOC. FIXATION (Sept. 20, 2022), <https://www.socialfixation.com.au/post/why-its-hard-to-stop-scrolling-psychology-behind-tiktok-scroll> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240425013456/https://www.socialfixation.com.au/post/why-its-hard-to-stop-scrolling-psychology-behind-tiktok-scroll>].

1 more frequently. TikTok Stories are meant to “inspir[e] audiences to check on their favorite  
2 creators daily to never miss a thing.”<sup>50</sup> [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]  
4 109. TikTok similarly sought to leverage young users’ FOMO with the TikTok LIVE  
5 feature.<sup>51</sup> By default, LIVE content—livestreamed videos and real-time interaction with TikTok  
6 users—is available only once: while the creator livestreams.<sup>52</sup> Young users must tune in  
7 immediately or lose the opportunity to interact.

8 110. TikTok compounds the urgency to immediately view LIVE videos with push  
9 notifications designed to get young users back on the platform to watch the livestreamed videos,  
10 even if they occur at inappropriate times, such as during school.

11 111. TikTok conceptualized [REDACTED] It  
12 believed [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

## 15 (5) Push Notifications

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

22  
23  
24  
25 <sup>50</sup> See Creator Academy, TIKTOK, [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240330031456/https://www.tiktok.com/creators/creator-portal/en-us/tiktok-content-strategy/tiktok-stories-what-it-is-and-how-to-use-it>].

26  
27 <sup>51</sup> See Laura Marciano, et al., *The Developing Brain in the Digital Era: A Scoping Review of Structural and Functional Correlates of Screen Time in Adolescence*, 12 FRONTIERS PSYCH. 1 (Aug. 2021).

28 <sup>52</sup> See Creator Academy, *supra* note 50.

1           113.     The TikTok platform’s push notifications alert young users on their smartphones  
2 and desktops even when the TikTok platform is not open, including when the device is not being  
3 used.

4           114.     TikTok purposefully and carefully designed these notifications, including how  
5 they are “pushed” and displayed, to increase young users’ time spent on its platform by taking  
6 advantage of well-understood neurological and psychological phenomena, including using sounds  
7 and vibrations to trigger sudden dopamine releases and preying on youth’s social sensitivity and  
8 fear of missing out on seeing new activity.<sup>53</sup> These notifications include buzzes, lights, sounds,  
9 and onscreen messages that draw young users’ attention to their phones and desktops, and  
10 ultimately to the TikTok platform.

11          115.     Push notifications are accompanied by a “badge,” a red circle sitting atop the  
12 TikTok application icon on the user’s smartphone, to further draw the user’s attention. The badge  
13 remains until the user opens the TikTok platform.

14          116.     TikTok employees [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]

16          117.     TikTok operationalized this goal by creating a plethora of push notifications to  
17 unfairly entice young users by optimizing the time and frequency of push notifications to compel  
18 a user to return to the platform.

19          118.     Yet another tactic that TikTok uses to manipulate young users to prolong their  
20 time on or return to its platform is deploying “Intermittent Variable Rewards” (IVRs)—the same  
21 psychological mechanism that underlies the addictive nature of slot machines.

22          119.     IVRs provide positive stimuli at random, unpredictable intervals interspersed with  
23 neutral stimuli. When a positive stimuli is received (*e.g.*, a notification that someone “liked” your  
24 post), it creates a psychologically-pleasing dopamine release, keeping a user in a feedback loop to  
25

26 \_\_\_\_\_  
27 <sup>53</sup> See Trevor Haynes, *Dopamine, Smartphones & You: A Battle for Your Time*, HARV. U.  
28 GRADUATE SCH. ARTS & SCIS. BLOG (May 1, 2018), <https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240923233013/https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time>].

1 continually check the app for more rewarding stimuli.<sup>54</sup> Because the rewards are unpredictable  
2 and intermittent, young users never know if their next notification will be the one that makes  
3 them feel really good<sup>55</sup>—which keeps young users returning to the platform compulsively.<sup>56</sup>

4 120. TikTok knows that its IVR schedule for delivering notifications [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED].  
6 121. TikTok has even used fictitious badge notifications to lure users onto the platform.  
7 Badges are commonly used in smartphone applications to “[REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]” and ordinary users would understand it as such. TikTok relied on this perception to  
9 manipulate users into opening its platform. It designed a system to grab users’ attention by  
10 displaying badges with random numbers unconnected to any actual content or interactions  
11 available on the platform. TikTok employees [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 122. Notifications succeed at keeping young users on the TikTok platform as TikTok  
16 intends. [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 123. Notably, TikTok knows young users are directly harmed by receiving these  
21 incessant notifications, which interfere with users’ free choice to stop using the platform and  
22 disrupts users’ sleep. For example, [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED] Only recently did TikTok stop sending notifications during certain nighttime hours.  
25

26 <sup>54</sup> Rasan Burhan & Jalal Moradzadeh, *Neurotransmitter Dopamine (DA) and its Role in*  
27 *the Development of Social Media Addiction*, 11 J. NEUROLOGY & NEUROPHYSIOLOGY 507 (2020)

28 <sup>55</sup> See Mark D. Griffiths, *Adolescent Social Networking: How do Social Media Operators*  
*Facilitate Habitual Use?*, 36 J. EDUC. & HEALTH 66 (2018).

<sup>56</sup> Haynes, *supra* note 53.



1           129.     TikTok designs and engineers its platform to show Creators a “ [REDACTED] ” of Likes,  
2 comments, and view counts when they watch their own videos. This inundation of rewards  
3 encourages young users to post even more videos.

4           130.     TikTok publicly quantifies and displays the number of these pseudo-social  
5 interactions in a way that drives more use of its platform, despite knowing the harmful effects on  
6 its teenage users. In internal documents, [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]

9           131.     TikTok recognizes that the way its platform quantifies interactions, such as the  
10 number of Likes or comments, are of particular importance to teenagers. These interactions  
11 contribute to young users’ FOMO, addictive use, and social comparison.

12           132.     TikTok’s own research shows that [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]. For example, [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]. Despite being aware of the psychological harms caused by Likes  
17 and similar social interactions, TikTok continues to purposely use various methods to display,  
18 quantify, package, and notify young users of these social validation metrics to exploit their social  
19 sensitivities and coerce young users to spend an unhealthy amount of time on the platform.

20           133.     [REDACTED] a report  
21 explaining how coercive design impacts teenagers:

22           Persuasive design strategies exploit the natural human desire to be social and popular,  
23 by taking advantage of an individual’s fear of not being social and popular in order to  
24 extend their online use. For young people, identity requires constant attention,  
25 curation and renewal. At key development states it can be overwhelmingly important  
26 to be accepted by your peer group.<sup>61</sup>

27  
28           <sup>61</sup> See KIDRON, *supra* note 37, at 21.

1           134.     TikTok’s design and display of highlighting social validation and quantification  
2 metrics has an especially powerful effect on teenagers and can neurologically alter teenagers’  
3 perception of online posts.

4           **B.     TikTok designs and provides beauty filters that it knows harm its young**  
5           **users.**

6           135.     In addition to TikTok’s features causing compulsive and addictive use, TikTok’s  
7 features also harm young users in other ways.

8           136.     TikTok’s so-called “beauty” features are an example of such further harmful  
9 features, as the beauty features implicitly encourage unhealthy, negative social comparisons—  
10 which, in turn, can cause body image issues and related mental and physical disorders.

11          137.     A 2022 TikTok study found that use of the TikTok platform was indirectly related  
12 to body dissatisfaction through more upward appearance comparison (users comparing their  
13 appearances to those of individuals they deem more attractive than themselves) and body  
14 surveillance (users scrutinizing and monitoring their own bodies), which results in greater body  
15 dissatisfaction.<sup>62</sup> The researchers also found that being exposed to a high number of positive body  
16 image media actually has a negative effect and results in an increase in appearance  
17 comparisons.<sup>63</sup>

18          138.     TikTok’s beauty filters and “Effects” allow young users to alter their appearance  
19 in photos and videos before posting them onto the platform. These, often unrealistic, appearance  
20 altering filters are especially dangerous to young users because they can lead to negative self-  
21 obsession or self-hatred of their appearance.<sup>64</sup> The beauty filters also harm young users by forcing  
22 comparison between their actual, real-life appearance and their edited appearance. Indeed, plastic  
23  
24

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25                   <sup>62</sup> See Danielle Bissonette Mink & Dawn M. Szymanski, *TikTok Use and Body*  
26 *Dissatisfaction: Examining direct, indirect, and moderated relations*, 43 BODY IMAGE 205, 205-  
08 (2022).

27                   <sup>63</sup> See *id.*

28                   <sup>64</sup> See Tara Well, *The Hidden Danger of Online Beauty Filters*, PYSCH. TODAY (Mar. 25,  
2023), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-clarity/202303/can-beauty-filters-damage-your-self-esteem>.



1 surgeons have reported an increase in patients seeking procedures to look better on-screen and  
2 have remarked that TikTok’s advanced “Effects” “blur[] the line between fantasy and reality.”<sup>65</sup>

3 139. TikTok designs and refines these filters to stimulate increased user engagement  
4 with the TikTok platform, thereby increasing TikTok’s revenues. TikTok knows these “Effects”  
5 can harm users, but it chooses to keep them and actively conceals the known dangers in  
6 representations to users, including parents and youth.

7 140. Even more egregious than the “Effects” filters is TikTok’s “RETOUCH” feature,  
8 formerly called “Beauty” mode. “RETOUCH” incorporates [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED] to artificially augment (or, in TikTok’s words, to apply “retouch/beautification/skin  
10 smoothing” to) the user’s appearance.

11 141. Through TikTok’s “RETOUCH” suite of tools, users can adjust many of their  
12 physical attributes to align with the user’s sense of aspirational beauty standards. For example,  
13 “RETOUCH” can change the size and shape of a user’s jaw, nose, lips, and eyebrows; whiten a  
14 user’s teeth; smooth a user’s skin; and adjust a user’s skin tone or color.<sup>66</sup> [REDACTED]

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

22  
23  
24 <sup>65</sup> Press Release, Am. Academy of Facial Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Inc., ‘TikTok  
25 Face’ Impact on Facial Plastic Surgery, [https://www.aafprs.org/Media/Press\\_Releases/  
26 %E2%80%98TikTok-Face%E2%80%99-Impact-On-Facial-Plastic-Surgery.aspx?WebsiteKey=5d3e122f-6cba-47ca-a903-c75cb1c94f61](https://www.aafprs.org/Media/Press_Releases/%E2%80%98TikTok-Face%E2%80%99-Impact-On-Facial-Plastic-Surgery.aspx?WebsiteKey=5d3e122f-6cba-47ca-a903-c75cb1c94f61) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240923234748/https://  
27 www.aafprs.org/Media/Press\\_Releases/%E2%80%98TikTok-Face%E2%80%99-Impact-On-  
28 Facial-Plastic-Surgery.aspx?WebsiteKey=5d3e122f-6cba-47ca-a903-c75cb1c94f61](https://web.archive.org/web/20240923234748/https://www.aafprs.org/Media/Press_Releases/%E2%80%98TikTok-Face%E2%80%99-Impact-On-Facial-Plastic-Surgery.aspx?WebsiteKey=5d3e122f-6cba-47ca-a903-c75cb1c94f61)].

<sup>66</sup> See Alena Arsenova, *What is AR Beauty and How It Benefits Makeup, Salons, and Retail*, BANUBA (May 19, 2021), [https://www.banuba.com/blog/beauty-ar-technology-  
possibilities-and-use-case](https://www.banuba.com/blog/beauty-ar-technology-possibilities-and-use-case) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240924161404/  
https://www.banuba.com/blog/beauty-ar-technology-possibilities-and-use-case](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924161404/https://www.banuba.com/blog/beauty-ar-technology-possibilities-and-use-case)].

1           142.     TikTok embeds the “RETOUCH” feature into the user interface such that the icon  
2 representing the “RETOUCH” toolset appears on the right-hand side of the screen whenever a  
3 user prepares to record a video.

4           143.     In the spring of 2023, TikTok created, designed, and published the “Bold  
5 Glamour” filter. This extremely advanced filter, like the RETOUCH feature, is a sophisticated  
6 face filter that dramatically alters the user’s image. Like the RETOUCH feature, it is very  
7 difficult for viewers to know that an image filter was applied to a video,<sup>67</sup> which may encourage  
8 unrealistic comparisons and foster body dysmorphia. TikTok’s Bold Glamour filter changes the  
9 user’s image to mimic the effects of makeup and cosmetic surgery.<sup>68</sup> The following before and  
10 after photos of the Bold Glamour beauty filter demonstrate the comparison.



20           144.     The Bold Glamour filter has been wildly successful by TikTok’s measures. It has  
21 been used in over 224 million posts.

22           145.     Also, in March 2023, the Dove personal care brand launched a campaign that  
23 urged the TikTok users to “#TurnYourBack” on the “Bold Glamour” filter.<sup>69</sup> Dove’s campaign

24  
25 <sup>67</sup> See Bruce Y. Lee, *TikTok Has a New ‘Bold Glamour’ AI-Powered Filter, Here are the Risks*, FORBES (Mar. 12, 2023), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2023/03/12/tiktok-has-a-new-bold-glamour-ai-powered-filter-here-are-the-risks/?sh=46f63d65f726>.

26 <sup>68</sup> Press Release, Am. Academy of Facial Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Inc., *supra*  
27 note 65.

28 <sup>69</sup> See Dove, *Dove Invites You to Take a Stand and #TurnYourBack to Digital Distortion*,  
PR NEWswire (Mar. 8, 2023), <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dove-invites-you-to->

(continued...)

1 cited studies that found that 52% of girls reported using image-altering features every day, and  
2 80% had used a social media platform to change their appearance before the age of 13.<sup>70</sup> Further  
3 studies cited in the Dove campaign found that 50% of girls believed that they did not look good  
4 without editing their content and that 77% reported trying to change or hide at least one part of  
5 their body using TikTok’s “beauty” features.<sup>71</sup>

6 146. Two months after the “#TurnYourBack” initiative, [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 147. [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]

14 148. TikTok’s decision to design and deploy these beauty filters, especially in  
15 combination with other TikTok product features, harms users. These harms include but are not  
16 limited to causing and/or exacerbating: body image issues, including through perpetuating certain  
17 beauty stereotypes, such as structural facial features and skin color, that favor Caucasian or  
18 European features; eating disorders; body dysmorphia; and related problems.<sup>72</sup> That harm is only  
19 compounded for young users by the other TikTok product features that also encourage social  
20 comparison. TikTok deploys these filters despite knowing they could harm young users.

21  
22 [take-a-stand-and-turnyourback-to-digital-distortion-301766207.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924163430/https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dove-invites-you-to-take-a-stand-and-turnyourback-to-digital-distortion-301766207.html)  
23 [\[https://web.archive.org/web/20240924163430/https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dove-](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924163430/https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dove-invites-you-to-take-a-stand-and-turnyourback-to-digital-distortion-301766207.html)  
24 [invites-you-to-take-a-stand-and-turnyourback-to-digital-distortion-301766207.html\]](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924163430/https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dove-invites-you-to-take-a-stand-and-turnyourback-to-digital-distortion-301766207.html)..

25 <sup>70</sup> See *id.*

26 <sup>71</sup> See *id.*

27 <sup>72</sup> See Scott Griffiths, et al., *The Contribution of Social Media to Body Dissatisfaction,*  
28 *Eating Disorder Symptoms, and Anabolic Steroid Use Among Sexual Minority Men*, 21  
CYBERPSYCHOLOGY, BEHAV. & SOC. NETWORKING 149, 149 (Mar. 1, 2018); Siân McLean, et al.,  
*Photoshopping the Selfie: Self photo Editing and Photo Investment Are Associated with Body*  
*Dissatisfaction in Adolescent Girls*, 48 INT’L J. OF EATING DISORDERS 1132, 1133 (Aug. 27,  
2015); Jing Yang, et al., *Selfie-Viewing and Facial Dissatisfaction Among Emerging Adults: A*  
*Moderated Mediation Model of Appearance Comparisons and Self-Objectification*, 17 INT’L J.  
ENV’T RES. & PUB. HEALTH 672, 672 (Jan. 2020).

1           149.     A 2021 study measured the harmful impacts of “beauty” filters on users. It found  
2 that users reporting a higher initial level of self-esteem felt that they looked 44% worse before  
3 their image was edited using a filter. In a follow-up survey, “when the AR [augmented reality]  
4 filter increased the gap between how participants wanted to look and how they felt they actually  
5 looked, it reduced their self-compassion and tolerance for their own physical flaws.”<sup>73</sup>

6           150.     TikTok knows that these beauty filters cause significant harm to young users. For  
7 example, internal documents report “  
8  
9 ”

10          151.     But TikTok also knows that “beauty” features, such as the “Effects” (including the  
11 “Bold Glamour” filter) and “RETOUCH” toolset, increase engagement with the TikTok Platform  
12 and, in turn, Defendants’ profit.

13           **C.     Through these features, TikTok harms children and teens.**

14          152.     Compulsive use of the platform is harmful, especially for younger users.  
15 Compulsive use correlates with many negative mental health effects, such as loss of analytical  
16 skills, memory formation, contextual thinking, conversational depth, and empathy, as well as  
17 increased anxiety. Compulsive use of the platform also interferes with essential personal  
18 responsibilities, like getting sufficient sleep, performing duties associated with work and school  
19 responsibilities, and connecting with loved ones.

20          153.     The platform’s addictive qualities, and the resulting excessive use by minors,  
21 harms those minors’ mental and physical health. Among the harms suffered by TikTok’s younger  
22 users are abnormal neurological changes, insufficient sleep, inadequate socialization with others,  
23 and increased risk of mood disorders such as depression and anxiety.<sup>74</sup>

24 \_\_\_\_\_  
25 <sup>73</sup> See Ana Javornik, et al., *Research: How AR Filters Impact People’s Self-Image*,  
Harv. Bus. Rev. (Dec. 22, 2021), <https://hbr.org/2021/12/research-how-ar-filters-impact-peoples-self-image>.

26 <sup>74</sup> See, e.g., AM. PSYCH. ASS’N, HEALTH ADVISORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN  
27 ADOLESCENCE (May 2023), <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use.pdf> [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240919134400/](https://web.archive.org/web/20240919134400/https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-)  
28 <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media->

(continued...)

1           154.     Compulsive use of platforms such as TikTok’s presents with many of the same  
2 harmful effects to minors as substance use disorders.

3           155.     Internal TikTok documents [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]

9           156.     In a [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]

12          157.     Internally, [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]

15          158.     Internal documents confirm that [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]

18          159.     An internal TikTok research report [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]

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25 [use.pdf](#)]; see also MEGAN A. MORENO & ANNA F. JOLLIFF, HANDBOOK OF ADOLESCENT DIGITAL  
26 MEDIA USE AND MENTAL HEALTH, 217–41 (2022); Huges Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., *Use of Social*  
27 *Media Is Associated with Short Sleep Duration in a Dose-response Manner in Students Aged 11*  
28 *to 20 years*, 107 ACTA PAEDIATRICA 694 (2018); Eti B. Simon & Matthew P. Walker, *Sleep Loss*  
*Causes Social Withdrawal and Loneliness*, 9 NATURE COMM’N 1, 4 (2018); Els van der Helm et  
al., *Sleep Deprivation Impairs the Accurate Recognition of Human Emotions*, 33 SLEEP 335  
(2010).

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160. As shown in the chart below, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

161. Additional internal TikTok statistics show that, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1 162. Internal documents also confirm [REDACTED] that:

- 2 a. [REDACTED]
- 3 [REDACTED]
- 4 [REDACTED]
- 5 b. [REDACTED]
- 6 [REDACTED]
- 7 [REDACTED]
- 8 c. [REDACTED]
- 9 [REDACTED]
- 10 d. [REDACTED]
- 11 [REDACTED]
- 12 [REDACTED]
- 13 [REDACTED]
- 14 e. [REDACTED]
- 15 [REDACTED]
- 16 [REDACTED]

17 163. Academic researchers corroborate [REDACTED] that social media  
18 addiction, including TikTok usage, is harmful to minors. For example:

- 19 a. Research shows that experiencing puberty while being a heavy social media user  
20 interferes with a crucial developmental period for social learning and friendship  
21 formation. Heavy users may emerge from puberty stunted or otherwise harmed,  
22 perhaps permanently.<sup>75</sup>
- 23 b. Research also shows that “[a]t the individual level, many [young people] have  
24 pointed to negative correlations between intensive social media use and both  
25 subjective well-being and mental health.”<sup>76</sup>

26 \_\_\_\_\_  
27 <sup>75</sup> See, e.g., Amy Orben et al., *Windows of Developmental Sensitivity to Social Media*, 13  
NATURE COMMUN 1 (2022).

28 <sup>76</sup> See Hunt Allcott, et. al, *The Welfare Effects of Social Media*, 110 AM. ECON. REV. 629,  
630 (2020).

1 c. There is also a study that demonstrates that deactivating social media leads to  
2 “significant improvements in well-being, and in particular in self-reported  
3 happiness, life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety.”<sup>77</sup>

4 164. External surveys also show that 16% of U.S. teens say they use the TikTok  
5 platform “almost constantly.”<sup>78</sup> Another 32% say they use it “several times a day.”<sup>79</sup> Of the teens  
6 aged 13 to 17 surveyed across all 50 states by the Boston Children’s Digital Wellness lab in 2022,  
7 64% reported that they use TikTok daily.<sup>80</sup> As described in Section III *infra*, [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED] that such addictive use inflicts great mental and physical harm on young users.

9 165. By maximizing the TikTok platform’s addictive properties, TikTok has cultivated  
10 a generation of young users who spend hours a day on its platform—more than they would  
11 otherwise choose—which is highly detrimental to teens’ development and ability to attend to  
12 personal needs and responsibilities.

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

15 167. 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.<sup>81</sup> Excessive, compulsive, and addictive use of TikTok’s  
18 platform keeps minors using it late at night and decreases the amount and quality of their sleep.

19 168. [REDACTED] as its internal research [REDACTED]

20 a. [REDACTED]

21  
22  
23 <sup>77</sup> See *id.*

24 <sup>78</sup> See Emily A. Vogels et al., *Teens, Social Media, and Technology 2022*, PEW RESEARCH  
CTR. (Aug. 10, 2022), [https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-  
25 technology-2022](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022).

26 <sup>79</sup> See *id.*

27 <sup>80</sup> See DAVID BICKHAM, ET AL., THE DIGITAL WELLNESS LAB’S PULSE SURVEY,  
ADOLESCENT MEDIA USE: ATTITUDES, EFFECTS, AND ONLINE EXPERIENCES 10 (Aug. 2022).

28 <sup>81</sup> See, e.g., AM. PSYCH. ASS’N, *supra* note 74; Seung-Schik Yoo et al., *A Deficit in the  
Ability to Form New Human Memories Without Sleep*, 10 NATURE NEUROSCIENCE 385 (2007);  
see also MORENO & JOLLIFF, *supra* note 74; Sampasa-Kanyinga, *supra* note 74; Simon & Walker,  
*supra* note 74; van der Helm, *supra* note 74.



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- b. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- c. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- d. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

169. [REDACTED] use of the platform impairs young users' sleep, [REDACTED] which TikTok's internal documents [REDACTED]

170. [REDACTED]

171. Young people are particularly attuned to FOMO, and often feel a need to check social media at night to assuage the fear that they may miss out on popular or engaging videos. To that end, some teenagers frequently wake up at night to check social media notifications.<sup>82</sup>

172. Ultimately, TikTok knows that [REDACTED] Yet to date, TikTok has not made the necessary changes to its platform to avoid these outcomes.

**III. TIKTOK KNOWS ITS FEATURES HARM YOUNG USERS BUT REFUSES TO MAKE THE PLATFORM SAFER, DESPITE INTERNAL RECOMMENDATIONS.**

173. [REDACTED] the platform harms mental health and [REDACTED]. But those safety improvements have been stymied by TikTok's leadership's pursuit of profits. For example:

<sup>82</sup> See Anushree Tandron et al., *Sleepless Due to Social Media? Investigating Problematic Sleep Due to Social Media and Social Media Sleep Hygiene*, 113 COMPUTERS IN HUM. BEHAV. 1, 7 (2020).

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

b. One internal strategy document suggested [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

c. TikTok knows that children use the platform at night, causing sleeplessness.  
However, TikTok’s own former global head of minor safety [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

d. TikTok employees have gone so far as to admit on video that teens are ideal to target  
as users when beginning a social media company; that [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; that [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; and that [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

174. TikTok’s business model has been extremely profitable. In 2019, TikTok’s  
revenue was [REDACTED]. By 2022, it was over [REDACTED].

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

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

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[REDACTED]

176. However, even though a non-personalized feed could have reduced many of the harms the recommendation system wreaks on minors by reducing compulsive use of the platform, TikTok CEO Shou Chew [REDACTED]

177. TikTok also considered but failed to implement other alternate design features related to screentime management and anti-addiction measures intended to help curb its users' compulsive use of the platform. For example:

- a. TikTok decided [REDACTED]
- b. Notwithstanding TikTok's [REDACTED] it took years for the company to roll out a feature allowing users to mute notifications. TikTok delayed making this easy fix [REDACTED]. Even when TikTok finally implemented this feature, it did so in a

1 substantially weakened form, by requiring minors to affirmatively opt into some  
2 aspects of the feature— [REDACTED].<sup>83</sup>

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

8 d. TikTok represents that it set a 60-minute default screentime limit for users under the  
9 age of 18. However, TikTok’s “limit” is not a hard stop, but rather is merely an  
10 easily avoidable checkpoint because young users can disable the screen or enter a  
11 passcode.<sup>84</sup> TikTok knows that its addictive features work to override young users’  
12 free choice to regulate their time such that these options are rendered unreasonable,  
13 unrealistic, and ineffective.

14 178. By contrast, TikTok’s sister platform Douyin, which is available only in China,  
15 imposes effective minor safety restrictions, including limiting some minors to 40 minutes of use  
16 per day and limiting the platform’s availability to certain hours.<sup>85</sup> To prevent overuse and  
17 addiction, Douyin users also may face a five-second pause between videos if they spend too long  
18 on the app.<sup>86</sup>

19  
20  
21 <sup>83</sup> See *Notifications*, TIKTOK, <https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/messaging-and-notifications/notifications> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240920164804/https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/messaging-and-notifications/notifications>].

22 <sup>84</sup> See Rachel Lerman, *TikTok Adds 60-Minute Limit for Teens But Leaves Easy Workarounds*, WASH. POST (Mar. 1, 2023), [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240924175950/https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/03/01/tiktok-time-limit-teens/>]; Sadia Israr, *How to Turn Off TikTok Screen Time Without Password*, LOGMEONC (May 31, 2024) <https://logmeonce.com/resources/how-to-turn-off-tiktok-screen-time-without-password/>.

23 <sup>85</sup> See Diksha Madhok, *The Chinese version of TikTok is limiting kids to 40 minutes a day*, CNN (Sept. 20, 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/20/tech/china-tiktok-douyin-usage-limit-intl-hnk/index.html> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240924181256/https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/20/tech/china-tiktok-douyin-usage-limit-intl-hnk/index.html>].

24 <sup>86</sup> See Matthew Humphries, *China’s TikTok Adds Mandatory 5-second Pause Between Videos*, PCMAG (Oct. 22, 2021), <https://www.pcmag.com/news/chinas-tiktok-adds-mandatory-5-second-pause-between-videos>.

1           179.     TikTok’s internal documents [REDACTED] that [REDACTED]  
2 [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED] but, as indicated above, TikTok has chosen not to implement the same safety  
4 measures for young Americans.

5           180.     To that end, TikTok’s former Global Head of Minor Safety said [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]

10          181.     Ultimately, TikTok chose not to utilize Douyin’s sensible minor safety restrictions  
11 on the TikTok platform and thus failed to protect young users in the United States.<sup>87</sup>

12     **IV.   TIKTOK’S SCHEME OF PURPORTED SAFETY FEATURES AND TOOLS, CONTENT**  
13     **MODERATION, COMMUNITY GUIDELINES AND PUBLIC ASSURANCES MISLEADS THE**  
14     **PUBLIC ABOUT ITS PLATFORM AND PLATFORM’S DANGERS.**

15          182.     TikTok engages in a fraudulent and deceptive scheme that misleads the public that  
16 the platform is safe and appropriate for young users through multiple avenues. TikTok’s scheme  
17 deceptively conveys an appearance of safety through numerous features and tools advertised to  
18 promote young users’ wellbeing, by claiming to subject the platform to Community Guidelines  
19 and meaningful content moderation, by minimizing the extent to which the platform is designed  
20 to induce addictive and compulsive use, by holding out safety as a priority for TikTok and  
21 representing the platform as safe. While each of these avenues is individually fraudulent and  
22 deceptive, they are also all part of a coordinated scheme TikTok employs to create a deceptive  
23 and false narrative about its platform and young users’ safety.

24          183.     But TikTok knows the truth: its touted features do not work as advertised, its  
25 community guidelines are not applied as TikTok advertises, its platform is poorly moderated,  
26 designed to induce compulsive use and is unsafe for youth.

27  
28                     <sup>87</sup> See Madhok, *supra* note 85.

1           **A. TikTok deceives the public about the efficacy of numerous features and**  
2           **tools that it advertises as promoting safety and well-being.**

3           184. TikTok deceives the public about its purported “safety features” and other tools it  
4 provides on the TikTok platform under the guise of promoting user safety and well-being. In  
5 truth, these features and tools do not work as advertised, and were designed to *appear* to mitigate  
6 certain harms without making meaningful changes.

7                   **1. TikTok’s claimed 60-minute limit is not a limit.**

8           185. Announced right before Shou Chew testified to Congress, TikTok has repeatedly  
9 pushed the idea that it sets an automatic 60-minute daily screentime limit for teens.

10          186. In a March 1, 2023 post on its website, former Head of Trust and Safety Cormac  
11 Keenan wrote that the screentime management tool would provide teen users with a “60-minute  
12 daily screen time limit.”<sup>88</sup> But this tool does not actually impose a screen time limit: after using  
13 TikTok for 60 minutes, teens are simply prompted to enter a passcode that they have previously  
14 created in order to continue watching. Young users can also freely change when this prompt  
15 occurs, with default options ranging from after 40 minutes to 2 hours on TikTok per day, or  
16 disable the tool entirely.

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

19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]

24          188. [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]

26 \_\_\_\_\_  
27 <sup>88</sup> See Cormac Keenan, *New Features for Teens and Families on TikTok*, TIKTOK (Mar. 1,  
28 2023), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/tiktok-teen-screen-time-family-pairing>  
[\[https://web.archive.org/web/20240929190635/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/tiktok-teen-screen-time-family-pairing\]](https://web.archive.org/web/20240929190635/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/tiktok-teen-screen-time-family-pairing).

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[Redacted]

189. TikTok’s default “time limit” proved to have negligible impact. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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



191. What TikTok concealed is that the screen time limit can be easily bypassed or even disabled. TikTok made similar or identical public representations in other contexts,

1 including January 2024 advertisements for *The Washington Post* reading “[t]een accounts  
2 automatically have a daily screen time limit of 60 mins.” These advertisements leave the public—  
3 especially parents who do not use the platform more than an hour per day—with a false  
4 impression that this tool imposes an actual limit on teen screen time, creating a false belief that  
5 TikTok effectively addressed concerns around excessive use.

6 **2. TikTok’s screentime management tools do not protect young users.**

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

10 193. TikTok also promotes its screentime management tools to parents and guardians  
11 through partnership with the National PTA and in press releases on its website.<sup>89</sup> For instance, in  
12 February 2020, TikTok published an article on its website entitled “Introducing Family Safety  
13 Mode and Screentime Management in Feed,” writing: “As part of our commitment to safety, the  
14 wellbeing of our users is incredibly important to us. We want people to have fun on TikTok, but  
15 it’s also important for our community to look after their wellbeing which means having a healthy  
16 relationship with online apps and services.”<sup>90</sup>

17 194. In his publicly available written testimony to Congress in March 2023, Shou Chew  
18 stated: “TikTok also has taken numerous steps to help ensure that teens under 18 have a safe and  
19 enjoyable experience on the app. . . . We launch great products with a safety-by-design mentality,  
20 even if those features limit our monetization opportunities.”<sup>91</sup> [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 \_\_\_\_\_  
24 <sup>89</sup> See Jordan Furlong, *Investing in Our Community’s Digital Well-Being*, TIKTOK (June 9,  
25 2022), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/investing-in-our-communitys-digital-well-being>  
26 [[https://web.archive.org/web/20230929035347/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/investing-in-](https://web.archive.org/web/20230929035347/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/investing-in-our-communitys-digital-well-being)  
27 [our-communitys-digital-well-being](https://web.archive.org/web/20230929035347/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/investing-in-our-communitys-digital-well-being)].

28 <sup>90</sup> See Cormac Keenan, *Introducing Family Safety Mode and Screentime Management in*  
29 *Feed*, TIKTOK (February 19, 2020), [https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/family-safety-mode-and-](https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/family-safety-mode-and-screentime-management-in-feed)  
30 [screentime-management-in-feed](https://web.archive.org/web/20200221014953/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/family-safety-mode-and-screentime-management-in-feed/) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20200221014953/https://](https://web.archive.org/web/20200221014953/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/family-safety-mode-and-screentime-management-in-feed/)  
31 [newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/family-safety-mode-and-screentime-management-in-feed/](https://web.archive.org/web/20200221014953/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/family-safety-mode-and-screentime-management-in-feed/)]

<sup>91</sup> See Written Testimony of Shou Chew Before the U.S. House Comm. on Energy &  
32 Commerce, (March 23, 2023) (hereinafter “Chew Written Testimony”).



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

196. Rather, [REDACTED]. In other words, [REDACTED]. More specifically, according to an internal [REDACTED] document [REDACTED]

197. Similarly, in a chat message [REDACTED]

198. TikTok also promotes screentime management tools for minors that it knows are ineffective. For example, [REDACTED]

199. [REDACTED] TikTok found [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1 200. TikTok also [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]  
3 [REDACTED] Similarly, TikTok [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]

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

9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 202. Another feature that TikTok heavily promotes to parents and parent groups is  
12 Family Pairing,<sup>92</sup> which, according to TikTok, “allows parents and teens to customize their safety  
13 settings based on individual needs.”<sup>93</sup> Yet TikTok knows the feature does not fix the problems its  
14 platform causes. As an internal document notes, [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]<sup>94</sup> Moreover, teens can easily bypass Family  
18 Pairing. The function works only on TikTok’s mobile application, so teens can avoid parent-  
19 imposed restrictions simply by using their phone or desktop web browser.<sup>95</sup>

22 <sup>92</sup> See *TikTok Guide For Parents*, NATIONAL PTA, <https://www.pta.org//docs//default-source//files//programs//pta-connected//tiktok-toolkit-2019-2020//tiktok-guide-for-parents-revised.pdf>, [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240925175118/https://www.pta.org//docs//default-source//files//programs//pta-connected//tiktok-toolkit-2019-2020//tiktok-guide-for-parents-revised.pdf>]; Jeff Collins, *TikTok Introduces Family Pairing*, TIKTOK (Apr. 15, 2020), [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240425180753/newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktok-introduces-family-pairing>]; Chew Written Testimony, *supra* note 91.

26 <sup>93</sup> See *User Safety*, TIKTOK, [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240528043614/support.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc/account-and-user-safety/user-safety#4>].

27 <sup>94</sup> See also Jacob Kastrenakes, *TikTok Now Lets Parents Set Restrictions on Their Kids' Accounts*, THE VERGE (April 16, 2020), <https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/16/21222817/tiktok-family-pairing-linked-accounts>.

28 <sup>95</sup> See *User Safety*, *supra* note 93.

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

4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7           204.     TikTok unfairly compounded the addictiveness of the TikTok platform for young  
8 users through their faulty and deceptive implementation of these features. TikTok touts these time  
9 management and other safety tools as if they are legitimate interventions designed to promote  
10 young users’ healthy usage of the platform. In fact, and what TikTok conceals, is that these  
11 features and tools are ineffective.

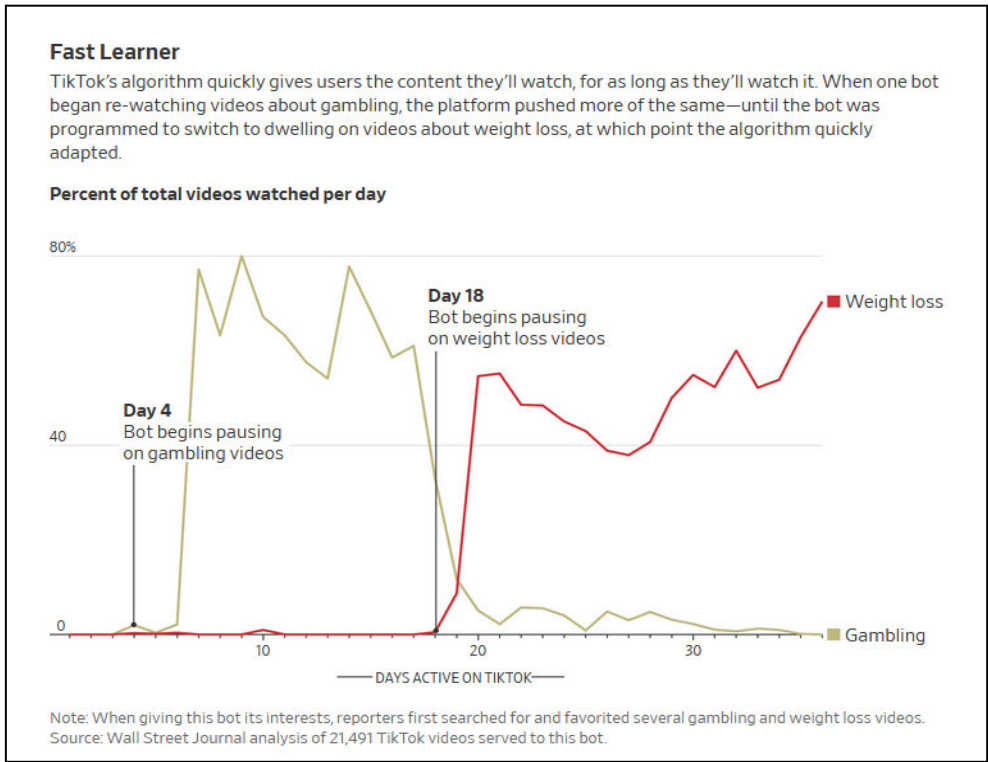
12                   **3.     TikTok falsely represents users’ ability to “Refresh” their feed and**  
13                   **escape harmful rabbit holes.**

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

20           206.     The recommendation system creates rabbit holes by quickly evaluating users’  
21 interests and then repeatedly pushing videos about those interests regardless of content. *The Wall*  
22 *Street Journal* published a chart showing just how quickly the recommendation system learns a  
23 user’s interest and then pushes content related to that interest:<sup>96</sup>

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27                   <sup>96</sup> See Tawnell D. Hobbs et al., ‘*The Corpse Bride Diet’: How TikTok Inundates*  
28                   *Teens With Eating-Disorder Videos*, WALL STREET J. (Dec. 17, 2021),  
                  <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-tiktok-inundates-teens-with-eating-disorder-videos-11639754848>.

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207. In internal documents, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].

208. Even rabbit holes that could be innocuous to some can be harmful to specific individuals. One internal document [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]:

[REDACTED]

209. After *The Wall Street Journal* exposé on TikTok’s algorithm and the harm caused to users stuck in rabbit holes, TikTok made changes to its platform that it calls “Algo Refresh.”

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

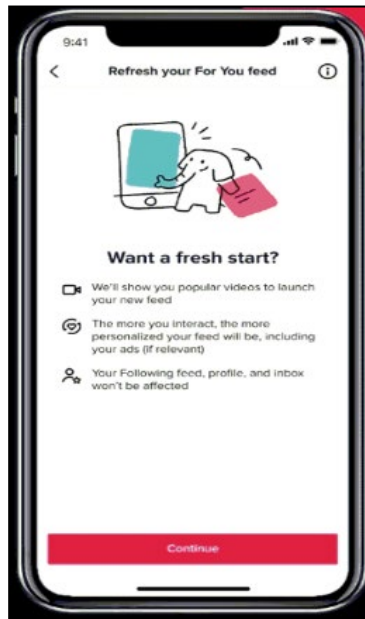
1           211.     After much [REDACTED] and external pressure, on March 16, 2023, TikTok announced  
2 the new “Refresh your For You feed” feature.<sup>97</sup>

3           212.     [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]

5           213.     TikTok billed the Refresh feature as “[t]he option to start fresh on TikTok.”<sup>98</sup>

6           214.     It further explained that: “When enabled, this feature allows someone to view  
7 content on their For You feed as if they just signed up for TikTok. Our recommendation system  
8 will then begin to surface more content based on new interactions.”<sup>99</sup>

9           215.     TikTok makes similar statements to users who access the Refresh feature on the  
10 TikTok platform. When users open the “Refresh your For You feed” page in the platform’s  
11 settings, they are asked: “Want a fresh start?” The platform informs users that activating the  
12 Refresh feature will allow them to “launch your new feed.”<sup>100</sup>



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<sup>97</sup> Sandeep Grover & Mabel Wang, *Introducing a Way to Refresh Your For You Feed on TikTok*, TIKTOK (Mar. 16, 2023), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/introducing-a-way-to-refresh-your-for-you-feed-on-tiktok-us> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240430163405/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/introducing-a-way-to-refresh-your-for-you-feed-on-tiktok-us>].

26           <sup>98</sup> *See id.*

27           <sup>99</sup> *Id.*

28           <sup>100</sup> *See Video*, TIKTOK, <https://p16-va-tiktok.ibyteimg.com/obj/musically-maliva-obj/0a66a83d69c5ba153546bb9b8fd0efbc.gif> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240927210731/https://p16-va-tiktok.ibyteimg.com/obj/musically-maliva-obj/0a66a83d69c5ba153546bb9b8fd0efbc.gif>] (hereinafter “Refresh Video”).

1           216.     Spokespeople for TikTok repeated these claims to reporters. For instance, the news  
2 outlet *TechCrunch* reported in February 2023:

3           With the new refresh button, which will be available in account settings, users will be  
4 able to force the app to bring “new, diversified content not based on previous activity  
5 or interactions” to their For You feed. After hitting the button, users will then begin to  
6 see content that’s based on their new interactions, a TikTok spokesperson told  
7 TechCrunch. In addition to providing a refreshed feed, the company noted that the  
8 feature could serve as a way to support potentially vulnerable users who want to  
9 distance themselves from their current content experience.<sup>101</sup>

10           217.     These public statements mislead the public to believe that resetting the For You  
11 feed would result in a completely new feed, as if the user was a new user, and that users would be  
12 able to escape rabbit holes of harmful content.

13           218.     However, the Refresh feature was never [REDACTED]. First, this feature is  
14 hidden behind a complex series of settings. [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17           219.     Not only did TikTok design the Refresh feature not to be used, but it did not even  
18 make the feature work. [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24  
25  
26  
27 <sup>101</sup> See Sarah Perez, *TikTok Introduces a Strike System for Violations, Tests a Feature to*  
28 *‘Refresh’ the For You Feed*, TECHCRUNCH (Feb. 2, 2023), <https://techcrunch.com/2023/02/02/tiktok-introduces-a-strike-system-for-violations-tests-a-feature-to-refresh-the-for-you-feed/?guccounter=1>.

1           220.     For young users previously stuck in rabbit holes, the recommendation system  
2 quickly reintroduces videos based on the same engagement data that led them into the rabbit hole  
3 in the first place.

4           221.     The Refresh feature also fails to reset presentation of personalized ads. [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]

8           222.     TikTok misled some users [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED]

12           223.     Contrary to TikTok’s misleading representations, young users may find that they  
13 are quickly back in the same rabbit hole again even after using the Refresh feature.

14                   **4.     TikTok deceives the public about Restricted Mode’s ability to filter**  
15                   **inappropriate content for young users.**

16           224.     TikTok misleads the public about the efficacy of “Restricted Mode,” which  
17 TikTok publicly described in an October 2019 post to its Newsroom as “an option that limits the  
18 appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all audiences.”<sup>102</sup>

19           225.     TikTok advised parents to enable this tool for their teens: “Note: If you’re a parent  
20 and your teen uses TikTok, it might make sense to enable this setting to ensure the content they  
21 are viewing is age-appropriate.”<sup>103</sup>

22           226.     On its website, TikTok says that young users in Restricted Mode “shouldn’t see  
23 mature or complex themes, such as: [p]rofanity[, s]exually suggestive content[, r]ealistic violence

24 \_\_\_\_\_  
25 <sup>102</sup> *TikTok’s Top 10 Tips for Parents*, TIKTOK (Oct. 16, 2019), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktoks-top-10-tips-for-parents> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240927211131/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/tiktoks-top-10-tips-for-parents>].

26 <sup>103</sup> *Limiting Unwanted Content*, TIKTOK (Apr. 25, 2019), <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/limiting-unwanted-content> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20231129050315/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/limiting-unwanted-content>]; see also *TikTok’s Top 10 Tips for Parents*, *supra*  
27 note 102 (listing “enabling Restricted Mode” as a tip for parents and describing Restricted Mode  
28 as “an option that limits the appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all audiences”).

1 or threatening imagery[, f]irearms or weapons in an environment that isn't appropriate[, i]llegal or  
2 controlled substances/drugs[, and e]xplicit references to mature or complex themes that may  
3 reflect personal experiences or real-world events that are intended for older audiences.”

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

7 228. TikTok promoted this feature to its partners to achieve increased publicity of its  
8 deceptive claims. In TikTok's estimation, [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]—an understanding that was  
10 then reflected in several “media stories.”<sup>104</sup>

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

13 230. Indeed, nearly two years after TikTok began making these misrepresentations on  
14 its website, TikTok's Global Head of Minor Safety told TikTok's U.S. Safety Head that  
15 “ [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED] ”

17 231. An internal [REDACTED] found that [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]

21  
22 <sup>104</sup> See also *TikTok's 'Family Safety Mode' Gives Parents Some App Control*, BBC (Feb.  
23 19, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51561050> (Restricted Mode “tries to filter out  
24 inappropriate content” and “tries to hide content that may be inappropriate.”); *Parents' Ultimate  
25 Guide to TikTok*, COMMON SENSE MEDIA (Apr. 26, 2024),  
26 <https://www.common SenseMedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-tiktok> (Restricted Mode  
27 “blocks mature content.”); Brandy Shaul, *TikTok: Here's How to Turn on Restricted Mode*,  
28 ADWEEK (Mar. 21, 2019), [https://www.adweek.com/performance-marketing/tiktok-heres-how-  
to-turn-on-restricted-mode/](https://www.adweek.com/performance-marketing/tiktok-heres-how-to-turn-on-restricted-mode/) (Restricted Mode “automatically filters content that may not be  
appropriate for minors.”); *TikTok Parental Control Settings*, INTERNET MATTERS,  
[https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/tiktok-privacy-and-safety-  
settings/](https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/tiktok-privacy-and-safety-settings/) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240927212409/https://www.internet  
matters.org/parental-controls/social-media/tiktok-privacy-and-safety-settings/](https://web.archive.org/web/20240927212409/https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/tiktok-privacy-and-safety-settings/)] (“Restricted mode  
“can help limit the appearance of content that may not be suitable for underage users.”).



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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

232. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

233. Moreover, Restricted Mode encompasses only the For You feed. A young user can easily circumvent the feature by, for example, watching videos that they search for, are sent directly to them, or uploaded by accounts they follow.

**5. TikTok deceives the public about its beauty filters and the dangers to young users they present.**

234. As of March 2024, TikTok had an entire webpage devoted to “Youth Safety and Well-Being” where it claims the company is “deeply committed to ensuring TikTok is a safe and positive experience for people under the age of 18.”<sup>105</sup> It goes on to proclaim that youth safety is a “priority,” and that TikTok creates a “developmentally appropriate” experience that is a “safe space” for “self-exploration.”<sup>106</sup>

235. As it makes such representations TikTok misleads the public that its wildly popular beauty filters and similar features on its platform do not pose dangers, especially to young users.

236. TikTok promotes its beauty filters, other beautifying Effects, and Effects that rate physical attractiveness, while actively concealing the significant physical and psychological risks to young users that such filters and Effects pose.

237. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

<sup>105</sup> *Youth Safety and Well Being*, TIKTOK, [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240509043157/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/youth-safety?cgversion=2023>].

<sup>106</sup> *Id.*

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TikTok did not implement any of these suggestions.

238. Moreover, as described above in paragraph 146, TikTok misled users by

[REDACTED].

**B. TikTok misleads the public about the extent of its content moderation enforcement.**

239. Although TikTok boasts thorough content review processes and a platform appropriate for young users, this misleads the public. Internally, TikTok notes that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

240. TikTok does not publicly disclose significant “leakage” rates, which measure the percentage of violative content that is not moderated or removed. Internally, TikTok knows the rate at which certain categories of content leak through its moderation processes, such as: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In reality, a much larger volume of violative content remains on the platform than TikTok leads the public to believe.

241. TikTok has also misled the public that content moderation policies have been applied across the platform. To the contrary, TikTok’s content moderation policies have [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Such statements are misleading and prevent the public from making informed choices regarding use, or children’s use, of the TikTok platform, while also exposing youth to harmful harassment, bullying, and solicitation.

1           242.     TikTok has also misled the public as to the diligence of its content moderation. To  
2 reassure the public of its commitment to content moderation, TikTok has published metrics such  
3 as the “proactive removal” rate. However, this metric simply captures how fast TikTok removes  
4 content that it manages to catch, not how much content it manages to catch overall.

5           243.     TikTok’s assurances mislead the public, particularly parents and youth, that its  
6 content moderation is increasingly effective, while its knows much of the platform has not been  
7 meaningfully moderated.

8                   **C.    TikTok deceives the public about the application and enforcement of its**  
9                   **Community Guidelines.**

10          244.     TikTok misrepresents the application and enforcement of its “Community  
11 Guidelines.” Specifically, TikTok misrepresents how effectively the Guidelines are applied, to  
12 whom and what they apply, and the role of experts in forming the Community Guidelines.

13                   **1.    TikTok deceives the public about how effectively Community**  
14                   **Guidelines are applied.**

15          245.     In its Community Guidelines, as recently as April 30, 2024, TikTok claimed that it  
16 “[r]emove[s] violative content from the platform that breaks our rules.”<sup>107</sup> TikTok’s Community  
17 Guidelines set out a number of rules as to different types of topics, including not allowing any  
18 “violent threats, incitement to violence, or promotion of criminal activities that may harm people,  
19 animals, or property,” “hateful behavior, hate speech, or promotion of hateful ideologies,” “youth  
20 exploitation and abuse,” “showing, promoting, or sharing plans for suicide or self-harm,”  
21 “showing or promoting disordered eating or any dangerous weight loss behaviors,” and “showing  
22 or promoting dangerous activities and challenges,” among other rules.

23          246.     TikTok has long made and continues to make statements to this effect, including  
24 when speaking to reporters, parents, and government regulators.

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28                   <sup>107</sup> See *Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK (May 17, 2024), [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240430123749/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/?cgversion=2023>].

1           247.     For instance, the public and TikTok users heard Shou Chew testify to Congress on  
2 March 23, 2023, that “anything that is violative and harmful we remove [from the platform].”<sup>108</sup>  
3 The public again heard Chew testify to Congress on January 31, 2024, and claim that TikTok’s  
4 “robust Community Guidelines strictly prohibit content or behavior that puts teenagers at risk of  
5 exploitation or other harm -- and we vigorously enforce them.”<sup>109</sup> TikTok repeated that latter  
6 statement on its Newsroom website.<sup>110</sup>

7           248.     TikTok uses the comprehensiveness of its Community Guidelines to reassure  
8 parents and others that its platform is a safe product for young users. TikTok represents that its  
9 Community Guidelines “apply to everyone and everything on our platform.”<sup>111</sup>

10          249.     In a Ted Talk in April 2023, Shou Chew explained that TikTok has “very clear  
11 community guidelines. We are very transparent about what is allowed and what is not allowed on  
12 our platform. No executives make any ad hoc decisions. And based on that, we have built a team  
13 that is tens of thousands of people plus machines in order to identify content that is bad and  
14 actively and proactively remove it from the platform.”<sup>112</sup>

15          250.     But these representations are misleading. TikTok’s actual internal policies and  
16 practices have long differed substantially from its Community Guidelines and other public  
17 statements, with respect to how TikTok handles both user-generated content and advertisements  
18 on the platform.

19 \_\_\_\_\_  
20 <sup>108</sup> See Chew Written Testimony, *supra* note 91, at 42.

21 <sup>109</sup> See *Senate Hearing with CEOs of Meta, TikTok, X, Snap and Discord About Child*  
22 *Safety 1/31/24 Transcript*, REV (Feb. 1, 2024), <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/senate-hearing-with-ceos-of-meta-tiktok-x-snap-and-discord-about-child-safety-1-31-24-transcript>; Clare Duffy, et al., *Mark Zuckerberg Apologizes to Families Over Social Media Harms in Contentious Senate Hearing*, CNN (Jan. 31, 2024), <https://www.cnn.com/tech/live-news/meta-x-discord-tiktok-snap-chiefs-testify-senate/index.html>.

23 <sup>110</sup> See *TikTok CEO Shou Chew’s Opening Statement – Senate Judiciary Committee*  
24 *Hearing on Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis – January 31, 2024*, TIKTOK (Jan. 31, 2024), [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240510085428/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/opening-statement-senate-judiciary-committee-hearing>] (hereinafter “Chew Opening Statement”).

25 <sup>111</sup> See *Community Guidelines*, *supra* note 107.

26 <sup>112</sup> *TikTok’s CEO on Its Future — and What Makes Its Algorithm Different*, at 15:20, TED  
27 (April 2023), [https://www.ted.com/talks/shou\\_chew\\_tiktok\\_s\\_ceo\\_on\\_its\\_future\\_and\\_what\\_makes\\_its\\_algorithm\\_different?hasSummary=true&subtitle=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/shou_chew_tiktok_s_ceo_on_its_future_and_what_makes_its_algorithm_different?hasSummary=true&subtitle=en) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20240924182721/https://www.ted.com/talks/shou\\_chew\\_tiktok\\_s\\_ceo\\_on\\_its\\_future\\_and\\_what\\_makes\\_its\\_algorithm\\_different?hasSummary=true&subtitle=en](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924182721/https://www.ted.com/talks/shou_chew_tiktok_s_ceo_on_its_future_and_what_makes_its_algorithm_different?hasSummary=true&subtitle=en)] (hereinafter “Chew Ted Talk”).

1           251.     Even though TikTok’s Community Guidelines claim that content about seductive  
2 performances by minors, drugs, gore, and physically dangerous behavior is removed or not  
3 allowed under its terms of service, in many circumstances TikTok permits such content to remain  
4 on the platform. Instead of actually removing harmful content from the platform, as it claims it  
5 does, TikTok often simply moves certain videos out of users’ For You feed. [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED].  
9           252.     When content is “[REDACTED]” or made “[REDACTED]” (or the like), it  
10 remains visible and available on the platform.

11           253.     For example, TikTok’s Community Guidelines claim that “content by young  
12 people”—meaning minors—“that intends to be sexually suggestive” is prohibited on the  
13 platform. Per the Guidelines, “[t]his includes intimate kissing,<sup>113</sup> sexualized framing,<sup>114</sup> or  
14 sexualized behavior.”<sup>115</sup> TikTok does not actually enforce this provision or similar prior  
15 provisions of the Community Guidelines. Rather, videos “[REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]” are not  
18 prohibited on the platform in the United States. Instead, such a video is merely “[REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED]” A training document [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED] Despite TikTok’s statements that its  
22 Community Guidelines help protect younger users, [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]

24 \_\_\_\_\_  
25 <sup>113</sup> “Intimate kissing” is defined in the Community Guidelines as “kissing that may  
indicate sexual arousal or the beginning of a sexual interaction.”

26 <sup>114</sup> “Sexualized framing” is defined in the Community Guidelines as “content that  
intentionally emphasizes clothed intimate body parts through techniques, such as filming, editing,  
or positioning of the body in front of the camera.”

27 <sup>115</sup> “Sexualized behavior” is defined in the Community Guidelines as “behavior that is  
28 intended to be sexually arousing, including performances or repetitive body movements  
emphasizing intimate body parts, and imitating sexual acts.”

1           254.     Similarly, instead of removing “[d]angerous weight-loss behavior” videos—such  
2 as videos that promote laxatives to lose weight and videos that promote losing more than 10  
3 pounds of weight in a week through diet or exercise routines—from the platform, as stated in the  
4 Community Guidelines, TikTok merely internally labels the videos “[REDACTED]” While  
5 this designation prevents the videos from appearing in users’ For You feeds, they remain visible  
6 to and searchable by minors. [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]:

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



14           255.     TikTok engaged in similar conduct for other types of videos as well. For example,  
15 the Community Guidelines claim that TikTok “do[es] not allow the trade of alcohol, tobacco  
16 products, and or [sic] drugs” and “do[es] not allow showing, possessing, or using drugs.”<sup>116</sup> The  
17 Community Guidelines further disallow “[m]arketing tobacco products, drugs, or other regulated  
18 substances” and “[s]howing, possessing, or using drugs or other regulated substances  
19 recreationally, including signs of being under the influence.”

20           256.     Yet contrary to this representation and prior similar representations, videos that  
21 feature illegal drugs remain on TikTok’s platform. Videos promoting drugs by [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]” were also left on the platform. [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

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27           <sup>116</sup> See *Regulated Goods and Commercial Activities, Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK,  
28 [\[https://web.archive.org/web/20240924222840/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/regulated-commercial-activities\]](https://web.archive.org/web/20240924222840/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/regulated-commercial-activities) (emphasis added).

1           257.     In some instances, TikTok’s Community Guidelines had policies that were never  
2 enforced at all. For instance, a previous version of the Community Guidelines prohibited content  
3 that “depicts or promotes the misuse of legal substances . . . in an effort to become intoxicated[.]”  
4 But until August 2022, moderators were not told to remove such content, and it therefore  
5 remained on the platform.

6           258.     Similarly, TikTok’s Community Guidelines expressly prohibit content “[s]howing  
7 or promoting” “[d]angerous driving behavior, such as exceeding the speed limit, running a red  
8 light, or distracted driving (including live streaming while driving).”<sup>117</sup> Despite that  
9 representation and prior, similar representations, TikTok’s internal policy was clear: “  
10 ” Again, TikTok merely removed that content from  
11 individual users’ For You feeds and personalized push notifications.

12           259.     TikTok also failed to remove gore, even though its current Community Guidelines  
13 state: “We do not allow gory, gruesome, disturbing, or extremely violent content.”<sup>118</sup> Gore, like  
14 drugs and dangerous driving, remains available on the platform, even if moved off the individual  
15 user’s For You feed.

16           260.     This pattern applies to other parts of the platform too. For instance, as of April 30,  
17 2024, the Community Guidelines claimed that “[o]ur guidelines listed above also apply to  
18 comments and messages.”<sup>119</sup> But direct messages have an even less restrictive set of rules.

19           261.     In another instance, as discussed above, the Community Guidelines claimed that  
20 the platform prohibits “content by young people that intends to be sexually suggestive.”<sup>120</sup> Videos

21 \_\_\_\_\_  
22 <sup>117</sup> *Mental and Behavioral Health, Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK,  
23 [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240924222917/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/mental-behavioral-health>] [under “More Information” within the “Dangerous Activities and Challenges” subsection].

24 <sup>118</sup> *Sensitive and Mature Themes, Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK,  
25 [<https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/sensitive-mature-themes#4>]  
26 [<https://web.archive.org/web/20241002184204/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/sensitive-mature-themes#4>] [under “Shocking and Graphic Content”]

27 <sup>119</sup> *See Accounts and Features, Community Guidelines*,  
28 [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240430123749/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/accounts-features/?cgversion=2023%5D>].

<sup>120</sup> *Sensitive and Mature Themes, Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK,  
[<https://web.archive.org/web/20240917223538/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/sensitive-mature-themes>].

1 of those performances are not recommended in the For You feed, but TikTok does not prohibit or  
2 in any way reduce the visibility of such videos when they are sent via direct message. Similarly,  
3 content showing minors possessing or using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco are forbidden under the  
4 Community Guidelines.<sup>121</sup> But that rule is not enforced for direct messages.

5 262. Although TikTok touts its moderators, internally it knows that much of its  
6 moderation “ [REDACTED] ” and [REDACTED] because TikTok created an ineffective system.

7 [REDACTED] For many types of  
8 content, [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

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

15 [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]”

18 **2. TikTok misrepresents who is subject to its Community Guidelines.**

19 264. On its website, TikTok states that it applies its Community Guidelines “to  
20 everyone and everything on our platform.”<sup>122</sup> That is false and misleading, because contrary to  
21 what it represents, TikTok treats some users differently.

22 265. TikTok permits popular Creators’ violating videos to stay on the platform. One  
23 internal analysis [REDACTED] noted that “ [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

26 <sup>121</sup> *Regulated Goods and Commercial Activities, Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK,  
27 [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240924222840/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/regulated-commercial-activities>].

28 <sup>122</sup> *Overview, Community Guidelines*, TIKTOK, [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240924222929/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/overview>].



1 [REDACTED]” Upon information and belief, after being urged  
2 by creator management teams—which work with popular Creators to produce content for the  
3 platform—TikTok allowed otherwise violative content to remain on its platform.

4 266. Even when TikTok’s moderation team wanted to enforce the Community  
5 Guidelines, certain groups of users, [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 267. For accounts that TikTok [REDACTED] an internal analysis [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED] found that [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]  
11 268. TikTok’s representations that Community Guidelines apply to everyone misleads  
12 the public, while also allowing violative content to remain accessible to young users.

13 **3. TikTok misrepresents its incorporation of expert recommendations**  
14 **related to safety into its Community Guidelines.**

15 269. TikTok announces on its website that its Community Guidelines “are informed by  
16 international legal frameworks, and industry best practices, including the UN Guiding Principles  
17 on Business and Human Rights, the International Bill of Human Rights, the Convention on the  
18 Rights of Children, and the Santa Clara Principles,” with “input from our community, safety and  
19 public health experts, and our Advisory Councils.”<sup>123</sup> However, TikTok’s conduct contradicts  
20 these representations to the public, contradicting expert recommendations related to safety and  
21 known to TikTok.

22 270. For example, [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]  
24 [REDACTED]

25  
26  
27 <sup>123</sup> *Community Principles, Community Guidelines, TIKTOK*, [<https://web.archive.org/web/20240924225324/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/community-principles?cgversion=2024h1update>].  
28



1 for all the strategic decisions at TikTok”<sup>126</sup> stated: “Safety and wellness—in  
2 particular for teens—is a core priority for TikTok.”<sup>127</sup>

- 3 c. Shou Chew further testified: “[T]here are more than 150 million Americans who  
4 love our platform, and we know we have a responsibility to protect them, which is  
5 why I’m making the following commitments to you and to all our users. Number  
6 one, we will keep safety particularly for teenagers as a top priority for us.”<sup>128</sup>
- 7 d. In a Ted Talk in April 2023, that had been publicly viewed almost 3 million times by  
8 May 31, 2024, Shou Chew referred back to his commitments before Congress,  
9 reiterating his first commitment “that we take safety, especially for teenagers,  
10 extremely seriously, and we will continue to prioritize that.”<sup>129</sup> He went on to say,  
11 “[y]ou know, I believe that [we] need to give our teenage users, and our users in  
12 general, a very safe experience . . . . If they don’t feel safe, we cannot fulfill our  
13 mission. So, it’s all very organic to me as a business to make sure that I do that.”<sup>130</sup>
- 14 e. A major public-relations problem for TikTok was the “Blackout Challenge.” The  
15 media reported that children died after copying a trend on the platform of  
16 suffocating themselves. As recently as April 2022, TikTok maintained an official  
17 media statement in response to the death of a Colorado child and a Pennsylvania  
18 child, stating in part: “At TikTok, we have no higher priority than protecting the  
19 safety of our community, and content that promotes or glorifies dangerous behavior  
20 is strictly prohibited and promptly removed to prevent it from becoming a trend on  
21 our platform.” Many media outlets, such as The Associated Press, NBC, *The New*  
22 *York Post*, *Newsweek*, and *People* reported this statement attributable to TikTok in  
23 April 2021 and May 2022.<sup>131</sup>

24  
25 <sup>126</sup> See Celine Kang, *Who is Shou Chew, TikTok’s Chief Executive?*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 23,  
2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/23/technology/who-is-shou-chew-tiktok-ceo.html>.

26 <sup>127</sup> See Chew Written Testimony, *supra* note 91.

27 <sup>128</sup> See *id.*

28 <sup>129</sup> See Chew Ted Talk, *supra* note 112.

<sup>130</sup> *Id.*

<sup>131</sup> See, e.g., Chantal Da Silva, *Mother Sues TikTok After Daughter Dies Following*

(continued...)

1 f. TikTok touts its so-called “safety features” that, ostensibly, render the platform safe.  
2 For instance, in a March 1, 2023 blog post, TikTok announced a series of features  
3 that allegedly increased the safety of the platform. The blog post, under the “Safety”  
4 section of TikTok’s website, claimed that “[t]hese features add to our robust existing  
5 safety settings for teen accounts.”<sup>132</sup>

6 g. Similarly, in an October 17, 2022 post on the TikTok website, TikTok claimed the  
7 platform was safe: “We have a vibrant and inspiring community on TikTok, and it’s  
8 important that our platform remains a safe, supportive, and joyful place for our  
9 community.”<sup>133</sup>

10 275. While engaging in these and similar misrepresentations, TikTok designed and  
11 operates its platform to prioritize user engagement and actively conceals the risks its platform  
12 poses to young users.

13 **E. TikTok deceives the public about its efforts to prolong user engagement**  
14 **through compulsive design elements.**

15 276. TikTok misleads consumers about the purpose and effect of the compulsive design  
16 elements it incorporates into its platform. Leaders at TikTok downplay and deny the impact of the  
17  
18

19 *“Blackout Challenge,”* NBC NEWS (May 13, 2022), [https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/mother-sues-tiktok-daughter-dies-blackout-challenge-rcna28671)  
20 [news/mother-sues-tiktok-daughter-dies-blackout-challenge-rcna28671](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/mother-sues-tiktok-daughter-dies-blackout-challenge-rcna28671); Matthew Impelli, *TikTok*  
21 *Blackout Choking Challenge Leads to 12-Year-Old Boy Becoming Brain Dead*, NEWSWEEK (Mar.  
22 30, 2021), [https://www.newsweek.com/tiktok-blackout-choking-challenge-leads-12-year-old-](https://www.newsweek.com/tiktok-blackout-choking-challenge-leads-12-year-old-boy-becoming-brain-dead-1579927)  
23 [boy-becoming-brain-dead-1579927](https://www.newsweek.com/tiktok-blackout-choking-challenge-leads-12-year-old-boy-becoming-brain-dead-1579927); Joshua Rhett Miller, *Colorado Boy Left Brain-Dead After*  
24 *TikTok “Blackout Challenge” Dies*, N.Y. POST (Apr. 14, 2021),  
25 <https://nypost.com/2021/04/14/colorado-boy-left-brain-dead-after-blackout-challenge-dies/>;  
26 Naledi Ushe, *Colorado Boy, 12, Dies 19 Days After Choking Himself in “Blackout Challenge”*  
27 *Found on TikTok*, PEOPLE (Apr. 14, 2021), [https://people.com/human-interest/colorado-boy-dies-](https://people.com/human-interest/colorado-boy-dies-after-choking-himself-blackout-challenge-tiktok/)  
28 [after-choking-himself-blackout-challenge-tiktok/](https://people.com/human-interest/colorado-boy-dies-after-choking-himself-blackout-challenge-tiktok/); *Colorado Boy Dies After Taking Part in*  
*“Blackout Challenge,”* ASSOCIATED PRESS (Apr. 14, 2021), [https://apnews.com/article/aurora-](https://apnews.com/article/aurora-obituaries-colorado-denver-c4b2454d5889193d8555c94477aea624)  
[obituaries-colorado-denver-c4b2454d5889193d8555c94477aea624](https://apnews.com/article/aurora-obituaries-colorado-denver-c4b2454d5889193d8555c94477aea624).

<sup>132</sup> See Cormac Keenan, *New Features for Teens and Families on TikTok*, TIKTOK (Mar. 2023), [[https://web.archive.org/web/20230729135436/https://www.tiktok.com/community-](https://web.archive.org/web/20230729135436/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/mental-behavioral-health/?cgversion=2023)  
[guidelines/en/mental-behavioral-health/?cgversion=2023](https://web.archive.org/web/20230729135436/https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/mental-behavioral-health/?cgversion=2023)].

<sup>133</sup> See *Enhancing the LIVE Community Experience with New Features, Updates, and Policies*, TIKTOK (Oct. 17, 2022), [https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-](https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-community-experience)  
[community-experience](https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-community-experience) [[https://web.archive.org/web/20231129051101/https://newsroom.](https://web.archive.org/web/20231129051101/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-community-experience)  
[tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-community-experience](https://web.archive.org/web/20231129051101/https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/enhancing-the-live-community-experience)].

1 platform’s compulsive design elements by emphasizing that the platform provides a positive  
2 experience for users and incorporates time-management tools.

3 277. For example, when asked by Congress in October 2021 if TikTok is specifically  
4 designed to keep users engaged as long as possible, the public and TikTok’s users heard TikTok’s  
5 Vice President & Head of Public Policy, Michael Beckerman testify: “We want to make sure that  
6 people are having an entertaining experience, you know like TV or movies, TikTok is meant to be  
7 entertaining. But we do think we have a responsibility, along with parents, to make sure that it’s  
8 being used in a responsible way.”<sup>134</sup>

9 278. In April 2023 at a Ted Talk conversation, the public heard Shou Chew reiterate  
10 that TikTok’s “goal is not to optimize and maximize time spent. It is not.”<sup>135</sup> He further denied  
11 that TikTok has a financial incentive to maximize users’ time spent on the platform, stating:  
12 “Even if you think about it from a commercial point of view, it is always best when your  
13 customers have a very healthy relationship with your product. . . .”<sup>136</sup>

14 279. Such statements mislead the public as to the platform’s inclusion of compulsive  
15 design elements through which TikTok targets users’ time and attention. As discussed above,  
16 TikTok exploits psychological vulnerabilities to keep young users compulsively using its  
17 platform.

18 280. TikTok executives have touted the platform’s in-app time management tools to  
19 counter perceptions that the platform is designed to increase user engagement. At a congressional  
20 hearing about prolonged engagement in October 2021, the public and TikTok users heard Mr.  
21 Beckerman emphasize, “We have take a break videos, we have time management tools, and  
22 family pairing is another tool where parents can help limit the time their teenagers are spending  
23 on the app.”<sup>137</sup> Again, at a Ted Talk in April 2023, Shou Chew brought up TikTok’s time  
24 management tools and interventions, telling the public: “If you spend too much time on our

25  
26 <sup>134</sup> See *Senate Commerce Subcommittee Hearing on Consumer Protection* at 2:27:50, CSPAN (Oct. 26, 2021), <https://www.c-span.org/video/?515533-1/online-protection-children>.

27 <sup>135</sup> See Chew Ted Talk, *supra* note 112.

28 <sup>136</sup> See *id.*

<sup>137</sup> See *Senate Commerce Subcommittee Hearing on Consumer Protection*, *supra* note 134.

1 platform, we will proactively send you videos to tell you to get off the platform. And depending  
2 on the time of day: If it's late at night, [the video] will come sooner."<sup>138</sup> By touting these tools,  
3 TikTok creates the impression that it is effectively managing compulsive use, instead of  
4 encouraging it through TikTok's design features.

5 281. But, as TikTok knows, that impression is not true and is misleading. [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 282. TikTok misleads the public, particularly young users and their parents, into  
10 thinking that the platform is not designed for compulsive use and has effective tools to mitigate  
11 compulsive use, when it does not. In reality, and as discussed above, *supra* Section II.A.,  
12 compulsive use is woven into the very fabric of the app. TikTok's internal documents show that

13 [REDACTED]  
14 with TikTok's own statistics showing that [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]

16 **V. TIKTOK EXPLOITS CHILDREN'S DATA WITHOUT PARENTAL NOTICE OR CONSENT.**

17 283. Along with targeting youth, TikTok collects, uses and/or discloses children's  
18 information without proper authorization. TikTok has collected and used children's information  
19 with actual knowledge it belonged to children, and has collected, used and disclosed children's  
20 information knowing that the TikTok platform is directed to children. In each instance, TikTok  
21 has not obtained adequate consent from or provided adequate notice to parents.

22 284. This exploitation of children's data violates the UCL. These acts and practices are  
23 unfair under the UCL. They are also unlawful violations of the UCL, because TikTok fails to  
24 satisfy its statutory and regulatory obligations regarding children's data. *See* 15 U.S.C. § 6501, *et*  
25 *seq.* (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, "COPPA"); 16 C.F.R. § 312.2, *et seq.* (the  
26 "COPPA Rule").

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<sup>138</sup> *See* Chew Ted Talk, *supra* note 112.

1           **A. TikTok collects the personal information of users it knows are children.**

2                   **1. TikTok had actual knowledge of accounts belonging to children.**

3           285. Starting in 2017, Musical.ly required most new users to enter their age to create an  
4 account on the app, and this carried over to the TikTok platform following Musical.ly’s  
5 rebranding as TikTok in August 2018.

6           286. [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED] Additionally, users who created a TikTok account  
10 by inputting their Facebook or Google credentials [REDACTED]  
11 [REDACTED].

12           287. TikTok’s age verification system thus had a critical loophole: [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED]

19           288. This loophole resulted in approximately [REDACTED] accounts with a listed age  
20 younger than 13. Despite its actual knowledge that each of these users was under 13 years old,  
21 TikTok continued to collect and use personal information from the children’s accounts without  
22 verifiable parental consent.

23           289. This was not an isolated incident—throughout its lifespan, TikTok has known that  
24 there were, and continue to be, large numbers of children joining and using the platform. For  
25 example, internal TikTok documents [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED]  
27 [REDACTED]

28

1           290.    An internal document [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4           291.    An internal TikTok Trust and Safety Memo [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6           292.    [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10          293.    [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15          294.    An internal [REDACTED] document [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

19                   **2.    TikTok’s policies permit it to overlook children’s accounts.**

20           295.    Before April 1, 2020, TikTok’s content moderation team followed a defective

21 internal policy when removing accounts that TikTok “suspected” belonged to a user under age 13.

22 Under that policy, [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED] In other

25 words, for example, if a user declared that they were nine years old in their biography but had

26 only posted [REDACTED] videos in which they appeared to be under 13 years old, TikTok would allow

27 that account to remain on TikTok. And TikTok would continue to collect that child’s personal

28 information without ever attempting to acquire verifiable parental consent.



1           296.     A more recent account removal policy amended this process, but it was also  
2 fundamentally flawed. [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED]  
6 [REDACTED]  
7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED] In such cases, TikTok continues to knowingly collect and use that child’s personal  
11 information without ever attempting to acquire verifiable parental consent to do so.

12           297.     In addition to such inadequate policies, on information and belief, TikTok simply  
13 failed to act on thousands of children’s accounts that (a) parents had requested be deleted, and/or  
14 (b) TikTok’s own content moderators or quality assurance reviewers had tagged as belonging to  
15 children.

16                   **3.     TikTok knows that many children bypass its ineffective age gate, if**  
17                   **an age gate is used at all.**

18           298.     Websites and online services sometimes attempt to screen certain users based on  
19 the user’s age. Often, this screening is attempted through a screen prompting a user to enter their  
20 date of birth. This process is often called an “age gate” or “age-gating.”

21           299.     On the occasions when TikTok has used an age gate, it has predominantly been  
22 used during account creation or for accounts that were on the platform but had not supplied age  
23 information when the account was initially created.

24           300.     TikTok’s age gate depends on children to self-report their age, and while the age  
25 gate may sometimes effectively filter some users under age 13 into “Kids Mode,” TikTok knows  
26 that under-13 users routinely supply a false date of birth when registering for TikTok. As alleged  
27 in paragraphs 311-322, *infra*, even in instances where under-13 users do not circumvent the age  
28

1 gate and are placed into “Kids Mode,” TikTok still collects their personal information without  
2 parental consent.

3 301. Not only does TikTok know that it is collecting personal information from  
4 children under age 13 without the requisite parental consent, but TikTok also knows that its age-  
5 gating processes incentivize children to lie about their age.

6 302. [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]  
8 [REDACTED] TikTok recognizes that [REDACTED]  
9 [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED] so they can enter the more permissive 13+ experience.

11 303. Internal documents show that [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]  
14 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED]

16 304. [REDACTED]  
17 [REDACTED]

18 305. TikTok still had not implemented age-gating with respect to accounts created  
19 through Google or Facebook by mid-2022. [REDACTED]  
20 [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED] Users who created TikTok  
22 accounts before May 2022 by inputting their Facebook or Google credentials had simply been  
23 granted full access to the TikTok platform without ever seeing an age gate on TikTok.

24 306. [REDACTED], TikTok described [REDACTED]  
25 [REDACTED]  
26 [REDACTED]  
27 [REDACTED]  
28 [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

307. A document [REDACTED] shows that TikTok [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] That

same document reveals that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TikTok was aware that significant numbers of these accounts without an associated birthdate likely belonged to users under the age of 13.

**B. The TikTok platform is directed to children.**

308. Independent of TikTok’s “actual knowledge” that it collects personal information from children, TikTok is also subject to the requirements of the COPPA Rule because TikTok, or a portion thereof, is “directed to children.” *See* 15 U.S.C. § 6502(a)(1); 16 C.F.R. § 312.2.

309. One internal TikTok document [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

310. TikTok is directed to children because, among other reasons:

a. TikTok’s “audience composition” includes millions of users under the age of 13. For example, in September 2020, TikTok had over [REDACTED] users who self-identified as under age 13 on “Kids Mode” in the U.S., and, as alleged above, TikTok regularly acknowledges the fact that there are many children present on TikTok’s “13+ experience”;

b. users under the age of 13 are an “intended audience” of TikTok, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED];

- c. subject matter, characters, activities, music, and other content on TikTok are child-oriented, such as accounts for My Little Pony, Pokémon, Cartoon Network, and Bluey;
- d. models and celebrities on TikTok are children and/or appeal to children, including some of TikTok’s most popular creators; and
- e. TikTok features advertisements directed to children, as those numerous advertisements feature characters, franchises, and subject matter appealing to children.

**C. TikTok collects personal information from children that is subject to regulation.**

311. TikTok collects personal information from children who use TikTok. Such collection is regulated by COPPA and the COPPA Rule. *See* 16 C.F.R. § 312.2.

312. Personal information collected by TikTok from each user with a self-reported age of at least 13 on TikTok’s so-called “13+ experience” includes, but is not limited to: first and last name; online contact information; screen or user name functioning in the same manner as online contact information; telephone number; persistent identifiers (including IP address and “cookies”); photo, video, and audio files containing a child’s image or voice; and unique device identifiers.

313. Even though TikTok has actual knowledge that “Kids Mode” users are children who have self-reported that they are under 13 years of age, TikTok nevertheless collects their information without obtaining—or even attempting to obtain—prior parental permission. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] TikTok did not need to collect all of the persistent identifiers that they collected from users in “Kids Mode” to operate the platform.

314. In addition to collecting persistent identifiers, TikTok collects a host of other information from children on “Kids Mode” and those on the “13+ experience,” including, but not limited to, [REDACTED]

1 [REDACTED] and  
2 numerous other pieces of information about the app itself. TikTok uses information it collects  
3 from users on the “13+ experience” to target personalized advertisements to those users.<sup>139</sup>

4 315. Some or all of the information that TikTok collects from children who use TikTok  
5 is “information concerning [a] child” regulated by the COPPA Rule. TikTok combines this  
6 information with at least one persistent identifier that it collects from that same child.

7 316. By combining this “information concerning [a] child” with a persistent identifier  
8 collected by TikTok, that information becomes “personal information” under the COPPA Rule,  
9 and the treatment of that information must comply with the COPPA Rule. 16 C.F.R. § 312.3.  
10 TikTok does not request or obtain parental consent prior to collecting this information from  
11 under-13 users.

12 **D. TikTok does not obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting or**  
13 **maintaining personal information from TikTok users under the age of 13.**

14 317. Despite TikTok’s “actual knowledge” of under-13 users and the fact that TikTok is  
15 “directed to children,” TikTok does not obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting, using,  
16 or disclosing the personal information of its child users (regardless of whether those children are  
17 using TikTok’s “Kids Mode” or its “13+ experience”).

18 318. COPPA and the COPPA Rule enumerate the minimum methods by which TikTok  
19 is required obtain verifiable consent. *See* 15 U.S.C. § 6501(9) and 16 C.F.R. § 312.5(b)(2).

20 319. TikTok does not use any of these methods.

21 320. [REDACTED]  
22 [REDACTED]  
23 [REDACTED]

24 TikTok has failed to do either.

25 321. TikTok also has not provided direct notice to parents of its practices regarding the  
26 collection, use, or disclosure of personal information from children.

27 \_\_\_\_\_  
28 <sup>139</sup> *Interest Targeting, Ad Targeting*, TIKTOK [<https://web.archive.org/web/20230610113755/https://ads.tiktok.com/help/article/interest-targeting?lang=en>]

1           322.     TikTok has not provided sufficient notice on the TikTok website or app about  
2 what information it collects from children, how it uses such information, its disclosure practices,  
3 and parents’ rights to review or delete their children’s information.

4           323.     As a matter of standard practice, TikTok does not provide COPPA-compliant  
5 notice to parents and does not collect verifiable parental consent to collect, use or disclose the  
6 personal information of any child.

7           324.     For all accounts on TikTok, including accounts created by children, there is no  
8 functionality or process for the company to obtain the verifiable parental consent, not even that  
9 which is required by the COPPA Rule for TikTok’s collection, use, or disclosure of children’s  
10 personal information.

11          325.     Yet, internal TikTok documents reveal that [REDACTED]  
12 [REDACTED]  
13 [REDACTED]

14          326.     TikTok has exploited children’s data without prior parental notice and consent,  
15 and thereby has also fails to satisfy its statutory obligations under COPPA.

16                   **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION AGAINST ALL DEFENDANTS**

17                           VIOLATIONS OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS CODE

18                                   SECTION 17500 ET SEQ.

19   (False or Misleading Statements)

20          327.     The People reallege and incorporate by reference each of the paragraphs above as  
21 though fully set forth herein.

22          328.     From a date unknown to the People and continuing to the present, Defendants have  
23 violated, and continue to violate, Business and Professions Code section 17500 et seq. by making  
24 or disseminating, or causing to be made or disseminated, false or misleading statements with the  
25 intent to induce members of the public to use TikTok’s platform when Defendants knew, or by  
26 the exercise of reasonable care should have known, that the statements were untrue or likely to  
27 mislead members of the public about TikTok’s platform. TikTok’s false or misleading statements  
28 include, but are not limited to, the following:

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- a. TikTok misrepresented, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication, that it provides “safety features” and tools that TikTok represents will perform various functions to protect young users, including its 60-minute limit, Refresh and Restricted Mode features, when in fact those features and tools do not perform as advertised and are easily bypassed or disabled;
- b. TikTok misrepresented, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication, that its beauty filters and other Effects do not harm young users, while actively concealing the dangers beauty filters and Effects posed to young users;
- c. TikTok misrepresented, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication that its Community Guidelines and content moderation policies are applied and enforced when they are not;
- d. TikTok misrepresented, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication, that its platform is not psychologically or physically harmful for young users and is not designed to induce young users’ compulsive and extended use, when it is in fact so designed and harms young users;
- e. TikTok misrepresented, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication that it prioritized young users’ health and safety over maximizing young user’s time on the platform or TikTok’s profits, when in fact TikTok subordinated young users’ health and safety to its goal of maximizing profits by prolonging young users’ time spent on its platform;
- f. TikTok misrepresented, directly or indirectly, expressly or by implication that TikTok prevents under-13 users from using the standard TikTok platform when in fact TikTok was aware that it does not prevent under-13 users from using the standard TikTok platform;
- g. TikTok has made other false and deceptive representations, including as set forth in paragraphs 182 through 282.





1 guardians or obtaining adequate parental consent, and thereby failing to satisfy its  
2 obligations under COPPA and the COPPA Rule.

3 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

4 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment as follows:

- 5 1. That the Court make such orders or judgments as may be necessary to prevent the  
6 use or employment by any Defendant of any practice that constitutes unfair competition or false  
7 advertising, under the authority of Business and Professions Code sections 17203 and 17535,  
8 respectively;
- 9 2. That the Court assess a civil penalty of \$2,500 against each Defendant for each  
10 violation of Business and Professions Code section 17200 in an amount according to proof, under  
11 the authority of Business and Professions Code section 17206;
- 12 3. That the Court assess a civil penalty of \$2,500 against each Defendant for each  
13 violation of Business and Professions Code section 17500 in an amount according to proof, under  
14 the authority of Business and Professions Code section 17536;
- 15 4. That the Court award disgorgement in an amount according to proof, under the  
16 authority of Government Code section 12527.6;
- 17 5. That the People recover their costs of suit;
- 18 6. That the People receive all other relief to which they are legally entitled; and
- 19 7. For such other and further relief that the Court deems just and proper.

20 Dated: October 8, 2024

21 Respectfully submitted,  
22 ROB BONTA  
23 Attorney General of California

24 

25 BRENDAN RUDDY  
26 MEGAN O'NEILL  
27 MARISSA ROY  
28 NAYHA ARORA  
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*Attorneys for People of the State of California*