

Shou Chew, CEO, Tiktok

Opening Testimony to the House Energy and Commerce Committee

March 23, 2023

Chair Rodgers, Ranking Member Pallone, Members of the Committee: Thank you for your time.

I am Shou Chew, and I'm from Singapore. That's where I was born, as were my parents. And after serving in Singapore's military, I moved to the UK, to attend college, and then here, to the United States, to attend business school. I actually met my wife here. She was born a few miles away, in Virginia. Two years ago, I became the CEO of Tiktok.

Today, we have more than a billion monthly active users around the world, including over 150 million in the United States. Our app is a place where people can be creative and curious; and where close to 5 million American businesses—mostly small businesses—go to find new customers and fuel their growth.

As TikTok has grown, we've tried to learn the lessons of companies that have come before us, especially when it comes to the safety of teenagers. While the vast majority of people on Tiktok are over 18, and one of our fastest growing demographics are people over 35, we spend a lot of time adopting measures to protect teenagers. Many of those measures are firsts for the social media industry. We forbid direct messaging for people under 16. We have a 60-minute watch time by default for those under 18. And we have a suite of family pairing tools so parents can participate in their teen's experience and make choices that are right for their family.

We want Tiktok to be a place where teenagers can come to learn, which is why we recently launched a feed that exclusively features educational videos about STEM. STEM videos already have over 116 billion views on Tiktok. I think Tiktok is inspiring a new generation to discover a passion for math and science.

I would also like to talk about national security concerns that you have raised, which we take **very, very** seriously.

Let me start by addressing a few misconceptions about ByteDance, of which we are a subsidiary. ByteDance it is not owned or controlled by the Chinese government. It's a private company. Nearly sixty percent is owned by global institutional investors; twenty percent is owned by our founder; and twenty percent is owned by our employees. ByteDance has 5 board members, three of whom are Americans.

TikTok itself is not available in mainland China. We're headquartered in Los Angeles and Singapore. We have 7,000 employees in this country.

Still, we have heard important concerns about the potential for unwanted foreign access to US data and potential manipulation of the TikTok US ecosystem. And our approach has never been to dismiss or trivialize those concerns – it's been to address them with real action.

That's what we've been doing for more than two years – building what amounts to a firewall to seal off protected US user data from unauthorized foreign access. The bottom line is this: **American data stored on American soil, by an American company, overseen by American personnel.**

We call this initiative Project Texas—that's where Oracle is headquartered.

Today, US TikTok data is stored by default in Oracle's servers. Only vetted personnel operating in a new company, called TikTok US Data Security, can control access to this data. Additionally, we have plans for this company to report to an independent American board with strong security credentials.

There is some more work to do. We have some legacy US data to delete in our servers in Virginia and Singapore. We expect that to be completed this year, and when it is: All protected US data will be under the protection of US law and under the control of the U.S.-led security team. This eliminates the concern that some of you have shared with me that TikTok US user data could be subject to Chinese law. This goes further than what other companies in our industry have done.

We will also provide unprecedented transparency and security for the source code for the TikTok app and recommendation engine. Third-party validators like Oracle and others will review and validate our source code and algorithms. This will help ensure the integrity of the code that powers what Americans see on our app. We will further provide access for researchers, which helps them study and monitor our content ecosystem. We believe we're the only company that offers this level of transparency.

Trust is about actions we take. We have to earn that trust with the decisions we make for our company and our products.

The potential security, privacy, and content manipulation concerns raised about TikTok are not unique to us—the same issues apply to other companies. What's needed are clear, transparent rules that apply broadly to all tech companies. Ownership is not at the core of addressing these concerns.

As I conclude: There are more than 150 million Americans who love our platform, and we know we have a responsibility to protect them, which is why I'm making the following commitments to you and our users:

- 1) We will keep safety—particularly for teenagers—a top priority for us;

- 2) We will firewall protected US user data from unauthorized foreign access;
- 3) Tiktok will remain a platform for free expression and will not be manipulated by any government;
- 4) We will be transparent and give access to third party independent monitors, to remain accountable for our commitments.

I would be grateful for any feedback you have. And I look forward to your questions.