

**COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS**

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS,
AND RELATED PROGRAMS

<http://www.meng.house.gov>
www.facebook.com/repgracemeng
twitter: @repgracemeng



Grace Meng

Congress of the United States

Sixth District, New York

February 25, 2019

**CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC
AMERICAN CAUCUS**

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

CHAIR
TASK FORCE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

SENIOR AND
REGIONAL WHIP

CONGRESSIONAL KIDS
SAFETY CAUCUS
CO-CHAIR

The Honorable Joseph J. Simons
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Simons:

I write to request that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launch an investigation into Facebook Inc.'s collection of personal health information from smartphone users. A recent investigation by the Wall Street Journal found that Facebook has been collecting information on millions of users' most sensitive health data – unbeknownst to those users and even if said users have no connection to Facebook. This invasive practice must be stopped immediately.

A recent analysis by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ)¹ found that Facebook installed analytics software inside thousands of apps, including apps that track users' ovulation, menstrual cycles and their blood pressures. As soon as the user opens and logs their sensitive health data, the pre-installed software promptly sends the data to Facebook by creating a "custom app event." For instance, in the WSJ's testing, the Instant Heart Rate: HR Monitor and Flo Health Inc.'s Flo Period & Ovulation Tracker, the latter which claims 25 million active users, sent heart rate data and ovulation and menstrual tracking data to Facebook, respectively. That data would then be available to Facebook users and developers, leading to the creation of targeted ads towards the users of those apps. The companies running the applications have no ability to remove or disable the software Facebook had installed and none of the apps gave users the option to stop their personal information from being sent to Facebook. Collection of such data is an egregious violation of privacy.

Facebook did not obtain clear consent from users to accumulate personal health data that users provided to the app. The FTC must investigate this intrusive and invasive practice, and put an end to it immediately. Smartphone users must be protected from this encroachment into their personal lives; they must know their personal information is safe. I look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,


Grace Meng
Member of Congress

¹ Schechener, S. and Secada, M. (2019). You Give Apps Sensitive Personal Information. Then They Tell Facebook. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/you-give-apps-sensitive-personal-information-then-they-tell-facebook-11550851636?mod=article_inline