

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2022

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230

Dear Mr. Chew,

We write to request information about actions taken by TikTok to remove content or prohibit viewing of content relating to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Not only has TikTok banned users in Russia from livestreaming or posting new content, it has also blocked users in Russia from seeing any content uploaded by non-Russian TikTok accounts, creating an information blackout that deprives the Russian people access to objective reporting about the atrocities being committed in Ukraine.¹ Alarming, recent reports indicate TikTok's non-enforcement of its own purported moderation policies has allowed Russian state media to flood the platform with dangerous pro-war propaganda. No company should find itself in the position of amplifying the Kremlin's lies, which fuel public support for Russia's war of choice in Ukraine.²

On March 6, 2022, TikTok suspended livestreaming and new content on its video service in Russia to protect itself from a "fake news" law, which banned content critical of Russia's actions in Ukraine.³ We are deeply concerned that, through its failure to equally enforce this policy, TikTok is enabling the spread of pro-war propaganda to the Russian public, which risks adding to an already devastating human toll for both Ukrainians and Russians.

According to reporting by *The Washington Post*,⁴ TikTok's suspension of new video uploads and live streams from Russia has not been equally enforced. Research from Tracking Exposed shows that before TikTok's March 6 suspension, new uploads in Russia related to the conflict were roughly balanced between pro-war and anti-war content, but between March 6 and March 25, more than 93 percent were pro-war.⁵ Alarming, a number of content producers evading TikTok's suspension are Russian state-controlled media such as RIA Novosti, effectively making TikTok a conduit of state propaganda.⁶ While *The Washington Post* reports that it appears TikTok belatedly closed this loophole on March 25, the misleading, pro-regime

¹ TikTok, *Bringing More Context to Content on TikTok* (online at <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/bringing-more-context-to-content-on-tiktok>) (accessed April 19, 2022).

² *TikTok's Censorship in Russia is Giving Putin Exactly What He Wants*, VICE (March 16, 2022) (online at <https://www.vice.com/en/article/epx8bw/russia-tiktok-censorship>).

³ TikTok, *Bringing More Context to Content on TikTok* (online at <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/bringing-more-context-to-content-on-tiktok>) (accessed April 19, 2022).

⁴ *TikTok Created an Alternative Universe Just for Russia*, *The Washington Post* (April 13, 2022) (online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/04/13/tiktok-russia-censorship-propaganda-tracking-exposed/>).

⁵ Tracking Exposed, *Special Report: Content Restrictions on TikTok in Russia Following the Ukrainian War* (April 13, 2022) (online at <https://tracking.exposed/pdf/tiktok-russia-12april2022.pdf>).

⁶ TechCrunch, *Russian State Media is Still Posting to TikTok a Month After the App Blocked New Content* (online at <https://techcrunch.com/2022/04/12/tiktok-russian-state-media-propaganda/>).

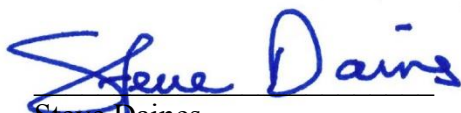
content that flooded the service has not been taken down, creating an easily-accessible archive of pro-war propaganda.

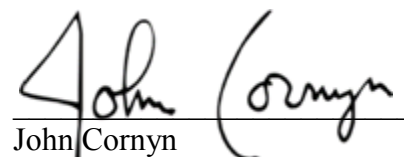
Additionally, we remain concerned that TikTok's broader disinformation and misinformation policies related to the Ukraine war are insufficient, fueling pro-war sentiment among TikTok users residing beyond Russia's borders.

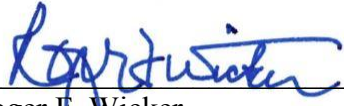
We request that TikTok provide answers to the following questions and requests for information:

1. Will TikTok remove Russian state-controlled media such as RIA Novosti from its platform?
2. What has TikTok done to remove pro-war content posted on its platform in Russia and Ukraine from March 6, 2022 to March 25, 2022?
3. What steps has TikTok taken to enforce the suspension of livestreaming and new content on its video service in Russia since March 6, 2022?
4. Has TikTok received any communication or indication from the Russian government related to their insistence in seeing anti-war content regarding the war in Ukraine removed, banned, or otherwise de-prioritized?
5. Information relating to TikTok's pilot state-controlled media account policy, including:
 - a. the jurisdictions in which TikTok is piloting its state-controlled media account policy.
 - b. TikTok's definition of "state-controlled media account";
 - c. TikTok's approach to designating state-controlled media accounts;
 - d. the accounts currently subject to labeling under TikTok's pilot state-controlled media account policy; and
 - e. TikTok's processes in place to consistently enforce its state-controlled media account policy.
6. Information regarding TikTok's efforts to combat disinformation and misinformation about the Ukraine war on its platform, including:
 - a. the size and geographic location of TikTok's "safety team focused on the Ukraine war";
 - b. the identities of TikTok's fact-checking corporate partners helping to assess videos related to the Ukraine war;
 - c. the process by which TikTok designates "coordinated efforts to influence public opinion";
 - d. TikTok's definition of "harmful behavior" and behavior that "incites violence"; and
 - e. TikTok's approach to moderating content it finds to be false, misleading, or a coordinated effort to influence public opinion.

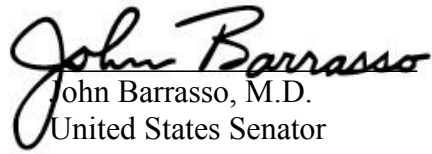
Sincerely,


Steve Daines
United States Senator

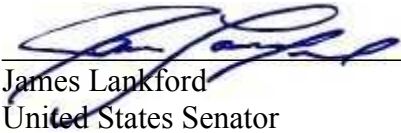

John Cornyn
United States Senator



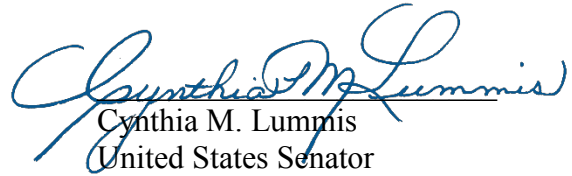
Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator