

# [***Congress Wants Answers About The FBI And DOJ s TikTok Investigation***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69TP-YPK1-JBCM-F4FV-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** A letter signed by the 24 members of the House Select Committee on China requests a classified briefing on the FBI and DOJ investigation of ByteDance, TikTok s parent company, and on the CCP s ability to surveil Americans.

**Body**

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WASHINGTON, DC - NOVEMBER 15: Chairman Mike Gallagher (R-WI) and Ranking Member Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) during a press conference with members of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party at the Cannon House Office Building on November 15, 2023 in Washington, DC.

Getty Images

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A new letter sent by the House Select Committee on China to the FBI is demanding answers from federal law enforcement agencies about their criminal investigation into TikTok, the dominant short-form video app owned by Chinese parent company ByteDance.

The letter requests that the FBI whichhas been investigatingByteDance for using TikTok tosurveil journalists, including this reporter provide committee members with a classified briefing about TikTok by December 22, 2023.

FBI Director Wray told the Senate that TikTok screams national security risk, Rep. Mike Gallagher (R WI), Chairman of the Select Committee, said in a statement. We re asking Wray to share those screams with the Select Committee before it s too late.

The FBI and DOJ investigation concerns a 2022 incident, in which TikTok and ByteDance acknowledged that a ByteDance team in China had used TikTok to access the location information of journalists, including this reporter, for the purposes of trying to catch ByteDance employees meeting with and leaking information to those journalists. The fact that China-based employees were able to access American journalists location information raised concerns among lawmakers that TikTok could be similarly used to surveil U.S. politicians, Chinese dissidents or other people at risk of physical harm by the Chinese government.

The letter also citesreportingfrom**Forbes**about a series of ByteDance preparations for the 2022 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) National Congress, in which cybersecurity auditors from several Chinese government agencies conducted an in-person regulatory inspection. This is the first publicly reported news article describing a specific instance in which the PRC government officials directly accessed a product that hosts secret TikTok information, and we are concerned that this put U.S. user data at risk, the letter says.

The letter mentions a September State Departmentreportwarning that ByteDance seeks to block potential critics of Beijing, possibly including those outside the [People s Republic of China]. It notes that as of 2020, the company maintained a regularly updated internal list identifying people who were likely blocked or restricted from all ByteDance platforms, including TikTok, for reasons such as advocating for Uyghur independence.

Rep. Gallagher, and the Committee s Ranking Democratic Member, Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), are not newcomers to the TikTok debate. Last December, Krishnamoorthibecame the firstDemocratic House member to call for a ban on TikTok, and joined Gallagher to co-sponsor a bill that would ban the app from the U.S. The bill was the first of several TikTok-related pieces of legislation introduced in early 2023, but it failed to gain traction after other legislators and the White House threw their weight behind a related bill, the RESTRICT Act, which would not flatly ban the app, but would give the White House more legal authority to ban it.

In March 2023, the RESTRICT Actrepresentedthe most formidable legislative threat to date against TikTok. It quickly gathered more than 20 co-sponsors, nearly evenly split among Democrats and Republicans. But shortly after TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew endured more than five hours of questioning at a hearing on March 23, the RESTRICT Act coalitionbegan to fall apart. Perhaps concerned about the ***politics*** of giving President Biden a win on China, Republicansbegan worryingthat the bill placed too much power in the hands of the president, and might allow the Biden Administration or future presidents to punish American companies, too. Some Democrats and civil libertariansalso arguedthat the bill would give the government undue power over civilian speech.

The RESTRICT Act stalled in spring 2023, and the summer passed without much legislative attention to TikTok but concern about the app is now on the rise again. Republican Senator Josh Hawley and othersagain askedthe Biden Administration to ban TikTok in November, this time because the platform was hosting a large volume of videos expressing pro-Palestine, anti-Israel sentiment. (TikTok s users are younger than the users of many other social media platforms, and young people are much more likely than older people to hold pro-Palestine, anti-Israel views.) Lawmakers also renewed calls to ban the app after posts expressing support for a letter from Osama Bin Laden, justifying the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States,went viralon the platform. (TikTok said that these posts violated its guidelines, and that it was aggressively removing them.)

The more we learn about the CCP s influence over ByteDance and TikTok, the more our concern grows, said Rep. Krishnamoorthi, the Ranking Democratic Member of the committee, in a statement. We look forward to hearing back from the FBI about what steps are being taken to address the current security concerns.

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