

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
FOREIGN RELATIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE  
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

September 19, 2018

Mr. Tim Cook  
Chief Executive Officer  
Apple Inc.  
1 Infinite Loop  
Cupertino, CA 95014

Dear Mr. Cook:

I write to express my concern with regard to recent reports that the Adware Doctor application (“app”), sold through the Mac App Store, was covertly collecting browser histories from users, storing the data in a locked file, and periodically sending this user information to a server based in the People’s Republic of China. Heightening concerns, moreover, were reports that Apple had been informed of Adware Doctor’s actions for at least several weeks but did not pull the Adware Doctor app until these actions were made public. For a company that prides itself on prioritizing user privacy and security, this delayed response is extremely disconcerting. It is also troubling that Apple researchers failed to uncover Adware Doctor’s covert collection and “storage” process. Over the last decade, Apple’s Mac App Store has seen more than 170 billion downloads, and your users have trusted your company to protect them from unsolicited intrusions.

I have serious concerns about China’s malevolent economic behavior involving the theft of U.S. intellectual property, which costs the United States hundreds of billions of dollars annually. However, the threat of American user data being kept on a server in China is equally alarming.

While I am aware of Apple’s efforts to protect against these intrusions by keeping apps compartmentalized from each other in “sandboxes,” it is evident that Adware Doctor managed to circumvent your implemented guidelines and protections. While I understand the difficulty in managing the security threats posed by millions of apps, in this case security researchers contacted you in mid-August about the Adware Doctor issue, yet actions to address the issue did not materialize until reports were made public on September 7, 2018. This significant lapse exposes a range of problems, not least of which are internal coordination issues and possibly a blatant disregard for significant user security concerns that were brought to your attention.

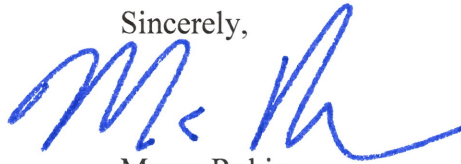
I therefore ask that you answer the following questions to address my concerns.

- 1) Why were the claims involving Adware Doctor’s use of user data not immediately investigated? Was this an oversight issue or were the claims of the researchers simply disregarded?

- 2) What steps will Apple management take to respond in a more prompt and efficient manner to researcher concerns that are brought to your attention?
- 3) What steps will Apple take to audit application updates in a more expeditious manner?
- 4) What steps will Apple take to ensure that applications using Apple's Mac App Store have appropriate security protocols in place to prevent foreign actors from gaining access to user data?

When users access the Mac App Store, they do so under the belief and reasonable expectation that the application options presented to them have been thoroughly vetted and approved by Apple. This incident with Adware Doctor has brought this trust into question. Therefore, I respectfully request that you provide the public with answers to the questions posed in this letter in order to provide needed transparency and accountability into how this incident occurred.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator