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September 20, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Chew,

I write to express my concern over the recent trend of viral videos on TikTok that encourage and incite vandalism at schools in Connecticut and across the country. You have a responsibility to delete videos, ban users, and restrict hashtags that glorify property damage and threats to school safety to prevent this destructive behavior from spreading.

TikTok has been repeatedly misused and abused to promote behavior and actions that encourage harmful and destructive acts. In the recent TikTok trend "Devious Licks," students film themselves stealing from their schools and destroying classroom property. As a part of this trend, teens in Connecticut clogged toilets and defaced bathrooms, putting an extra burden on custodial crews during a pandemic and costing schools money. In other states, students stole sinks and fire alarms, creating a significant danger to their classmates.¹ While TikTok has taken steps to remove these videos, these actions were too little, too late and do not make up for the damage to schools across the country.

TikTok has aggressively recruited an extremely young user base of children and teens, who have flocked to the platform. I am concerned that the Devious Licks trend falls into an unfortunate pattern on TikTok that requires significant attention and commitments to make the platform safer. In recent months alone, several even more dangerous viral trends have directly resulted in bodily harm, danger to others, and even death, such as "blackout challenges" that encourage kids to suffocate themselves.² TikTok must do more to swiftly find and remove

¹ Anna Bybee-Schier, "TikTok Trend Causing Vandalism At Fairfield Schools," *Patch*, September 17, 2021, <https://patch.com/connecticut/fairfield/tiktok-trend-causing-vandalism-fairfield-schools>; Jesse Leavenworth, "TikTok school vandalism viral challenge hits Connecticut," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), September 16, 2021, <https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-news-ct-tik-tok-school-vandalism-20210916-o22mhyjclfagfk26ofnxvqh73a-story.html>.

² Jordan Valinsky, "TikTok bans the 'milk crate challenge' because of injuries," *CNN Business*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/27/business/tiktok-bans-milk-crate-challenge/index.html>; Steven Vargas, "12-year-old Oklahoma boy found dead after participating in TikTok 'blackout challenge,' reports say," *USA Today*

dangerous content before it harms these often young and impressionable users. The continual emergence of destructive viral trends is unacceptable and reflects the fact that TikTok is simply not doing enough to ensure that its product is safe.

Within coming weeks, my subcommittee, the Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security, will hold a hearing about the impact of social media on children and teens to help parents hear directly from technology companies what they are doing to safeguard their young users. I have invited a representative from TikTok to participate to explain your policies, practices, and actual commitments for removing dangerous material and preventing harmful trends. I fully expect your company to participate, particularly in light of this alarming new trend. I look forward to discussing these matters with TikTok (or an executive from your company) then.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate