# United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 22, 2018

Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

Thank you for your recent public appearances and statements regarding Facebook's involvement in and response to the troubling collection of personal data from tens of millions of Americans. While we appreciate your recent engagement on this matter, a number of important questions remain unanswered. We write seeking more information regarding Facebook's internal policies for approval and governance of applications authorized to collect personal information; the extent to which apps have accessed data about users and their friends; and your company's approach to auditing applications that collect user data. We also request that you appear before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation to address these concerns.

According to a recent *New York Times* article, in 2014, Dr. Aleksandr Kogan, a Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Cambridge University, developed an app that harvested Facebook user data for psychological profiling.[1] Dr. Kogan's 'thisisyourdigitallife' application obtained information from 50 million Facebook users, while only 270,000 users installed the application themselves. Dr. Kogan was able to collect this data after telling Facebook that it would be used for academic purposes.

In 2014, Facebook revised its official policies to prohibit application developers from accessing "friends data"—personal information about the friends of application users, including their status updates, check-ins, location, and interests. Aside from Dr. Kogan's app, for a full seven years Facebook hosted thousands of applications—including the popular game FarmVille and the dating app Tinder—that were able to use this "friends data," despite a 2011 Federal Trade Commission consent decree, which requires Facebook to obtain explicit permission before sharing data about its users.

Finally, Sandy Parakilas, a former platform operations manager at Facebook, has claimed that an executive at Facebook explicitly discouraged him from conducting audits of external applications that had collected user data.[2] In 2014, Facebook announced it would be instituting "Login Review," a process by which a team of employees audit any app that requires more than the basic data of someone's public profile, list of friends, and email address. However, Mr.

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[1] Matthew Rosenberg, Nicholas Confessore & Carole Cadwalladr, *How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 17, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html.

[2] Paul Lewis, *'Utterly horrifying': ex-Facebook insider says covert data harvesting was routine*, The Guardian (Mar. 20, 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/20/facebook-data-cambridge-analytica-sandy-parakilas.
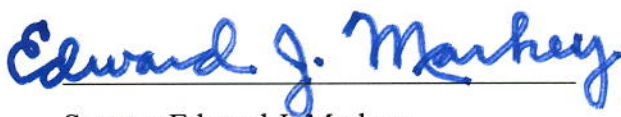
Parakilas' allegations would suggest that Facebook did not provide the resources or maintain policies that mandated the proactive application auditing that users would have expected.

We respectfully request responses to the following questions by April 12, 2018:

1) Describe in detail Facebook's policies, practices, and procedures for approving any applications that collected Facebook user data. After approval, how has Facebook verified that the collected data is used solely for purposes provided by developers (including academic entities) and not improperly used or shared?

2) Between 2007 and 2014, how many applications that accessed "friends data" did Facebook host? To your knowledge, did other applications misuse or fail to safeguard this data?

3) What is the extent of Facebook's right to audit external applications that collect user data? How many times has Facebook exercised its right to audit applications? How many times has Facebook required an application developer to destroy data based on concerns about misuse?

4.) Who was responsible for decisions to audit applications, and how many staff members were involved in this task? Have any Facebook executives ever discouraged employees from auditing such external applications? If so, why? Have concerns about liability for data misuse by application developers caused Facebook to discourage audits?

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Senator Edward J. Markey                    Senator Richard Blumenthal