NEWS RELEASE

Attorney General Mike Hilgers

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Attorney General Hilgers Files Suit Against TCL For Illegally Spying on Nebraskans

Today, Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers filed a lawsuit against TTE Technology Inc. d/b/a TCL North America ("TCL") for spying on Nebraskans without their knowledge or consent through smart TVs. According to the lawsuit, TCL has deceived consumers by recording everything they watch on their devices and selling the information to third-party data brokers and advertisers without giving consumers a meaningful opportunity to opt out. These practices are particularly dangerous given that TCL is a Chinese state-owned enterprise and operates under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. Under Chinese law, TCL is required to share information in its possession with the CCP should it be requested for intelligence or national security purposes.

TCL Smart TVs contain a technology called Automatic Content Recognition, or ACR, which covertly records audio and visual data from the device every 500 milliseconds without consumers' knowledge or meaningful consent. This data is then harvested and sold to third-party data brokers and advertisers, who use the information to transmit targeted ads to consumers. Tens of thousands of Nebraskans who own TCL Smart TVs are presently being spied on within their own homes as part of this mass surveillance process. The information taken from TCL Smart TVs could go beyond viewing habits and may be used to profile Nebraska consumers based on their religious beliefs, political preferences, health information, socioeconomic status, and more.

TCL has been able to undercut its competitors' prices by monetizing the data it extracts from Nebraskans' homes, which enables TCL to recoup its hardware margins through connected TV advertising. This process begins the moment a TCL Smart TV is turned on and is not limited to content streamed through TCL's native apps. ACR can extract everything displayed on the screen regardless of source, including cable and satellite feeds, gaming consoles, Blu-ray players, and laptops connected via HDMI—even when the TV is used as nothing more than an external monitor. Disconnecting from the internet does not protect consumers because the device saves information taken while the device is offline and automatically transmits it to TCL as soon as an internet connection is reestablished.

“TCL has deceived Nebraska consumers by forcing them to agree to continuous home surveillance without fully disclosing the extent to which their viewing habits are being monitored and monetized,” said Attorney General Hilgers. “Most Nebraskans would not have purchased a TCL Smart TV in the first place had they been truly informed about the nature of ACR and TCL’s relationship with the CCP.”

The lawsuit follows similar actions taken against router manufacturer TP-Link, and manufacturers and distributors of home surveillance equipment with ties to the CCP. Attorney General Hilgers is seeking to prevent TCL from continuing to deceive consumers and to make consumers aware of the security risks posed by TCL Smart TVs. The lawsuit requests civil penalties and fees from TCL for its violations of Nebraska’s Consumer Protection Act and Uniform Deceptive Trade Practices Act, among other relief.

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