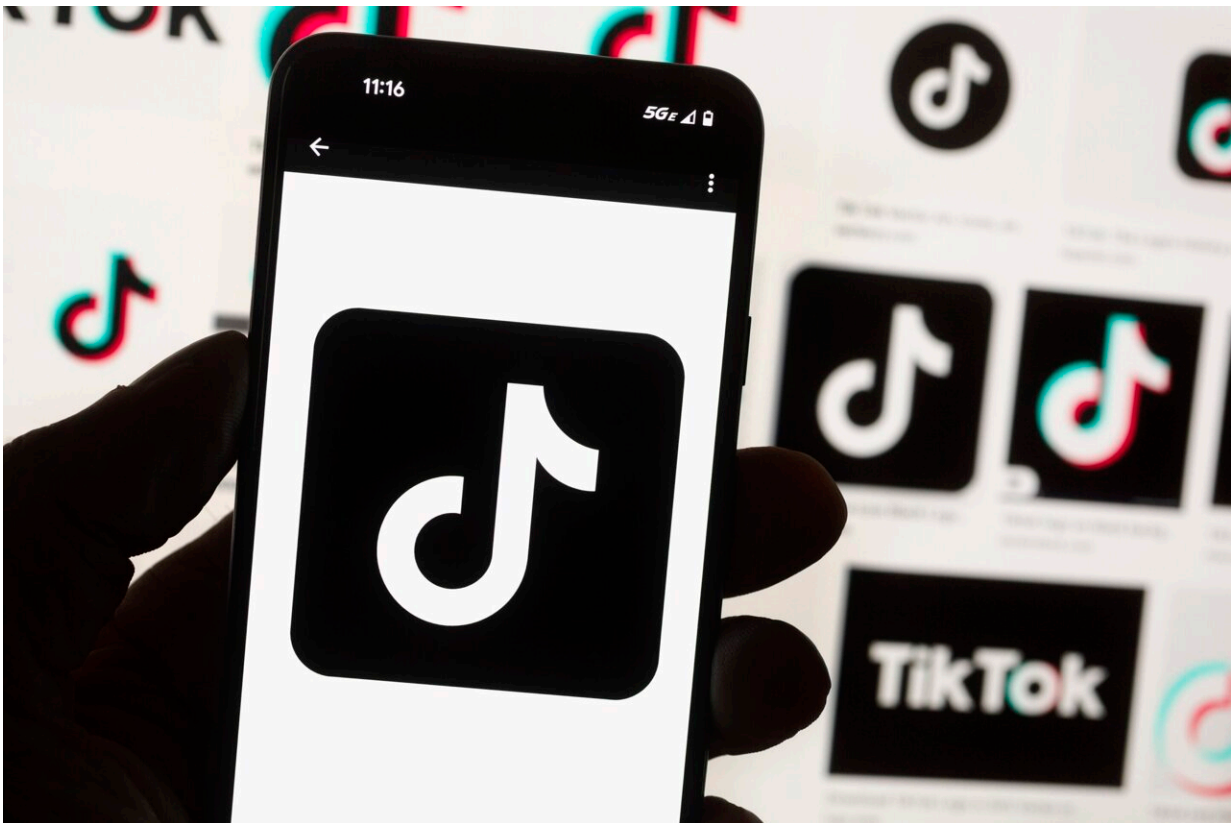


Georgia, NH latest states to ban TikTok from state computers

December 15 2022, by Jeff Amy



The TikTok logo is seen on a cell phone on Oct. 14, 2022, in Boston. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022, immediately banned the use of TikTok and two popular messaging applications from all computer devices controlled by Georgia's state government, saying the Chinese government may be able to access users' personal information. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Dwyer, File

Govs. Brian Kemp of Georgia and Chris Sununu of New Hampshire on Thursday immediately banned the use of TikTok and popular messaging applications from all computer devices controlled by their state governments, saying the Chinese government may be able to access users' personal information.

Both Republican governors banned the messaging app WeChat and other apps owned by Chinese firm Tencent. Sununu went further, banning apps owned by Chinese firm Alibaba and telecommunications hardware and smartphones made by Chinese firms including Huawei and ZTE.

Kemp also banned Telegram, saying its Russian control poses similar risks.

"The state of Georgia has a responsibility to prevent any attempt to access and infiltrate its secure data and [sensitive information](#) by foreign adversaries such as the CCP," Kemp wrote in a memo, using an acronym for the Chinese Communist Party. "As such, it is our duty to take action to preserve the safety and security of our state against the CCP, entities it controls and other foreign cyberthreats."

Sununu said the ban "will help preserve the safety, security, and privacy of the citizens of New Hampshire."

Kemp cited comments by FBI Director Chris Wray earlier this month that China could use the app to collect data on its users that could be used for spying operations.

Sununu ordered state agencies to remove any prohibited software or hardware within 30 days.

Kemp and Sununu are among at least 13 governors to take such an action, part of a wave that also includes calls for Congress to ban the use

of the programs from federal government computers.

Some agencies swiftly took action. Within an hour, Georgia's Department of Transportation posted a farewell video on TikTok to its 2,834 followers, saying "Follow us on Instagram, we will no longer be posting to TikTok! Thank you all for the engagement." The department had posted more than 80 videos since October 2021.

Andrew Isenhour, a spokesperson for Kemp, said guidelines to be issued by the Georgia Technology Authority later Thursday would include exceptions that would allow [law enforcement agencies](#) and prosecutors to access the platforms with special permission.

But the ban would also apply to state colleges and universities, many of which use TikTok to court potential new students and communicate with current students and athletic fans. At least 20 public Georgia universities and four-year colleges appear to have TikTok accounts, although some have never posted. Valdosta State University, for example, appears to have eight separate accounts.

Other states that have issued bans including Alabama, Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and Utah.

The U.S. Senate passed a bill in 2020 to ban TikTok, but it never passed the House. Other bills to regulate or ban TikTok and other apps are also pending in Congress. The U.S. [armed forces](#) have prohibited the app on military devices.

Critics say they fear the Chinese government is gaining access to critical information through the application and could be using it to spread misinformation or propaganda.

While there has been much debate about whether the Chinese government is actively collecting TikTok data, observers say TikTok would have to comply with any potential requests from Chinese security and intelligence requests to hand over data because the company's owner ByteDance, is a Chinese company.

ByteDance moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2020.

TikTok spokesperson Jamal Brown told The Associated Press earlier this month that the bans "are largely fueled by misinformation about our company."

TikTok Chief Operating Officer Vanessa Pappas, based in Los Angeles, has said the company protects all American users' data and that Chinese government officials have no access to it.

Former President Donald Trump issued blanket orders against Chinese tech companies that sought to block new users from downloading WeChat and TikTok in 2020, but lost in court. President Joe Biden has taken a narrower approach, ordering a Commerce Department review of security concerns. U.S. officials and the company are now in talks over a possible agreement that would resolve American security concerns.

A researcher with the conservative Heritage Foundation last month called on government officials to ban TikTok from operating entirely in the United States. But some other experts say the threat is overstated and that China gains little advantage from TikTok information that isn't publicly available.

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Citation: Georgia, NH latest states to ban TikTok from state computers (2022, December 15)

retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2022-12-georgia-nh-latest-states-tiktok.html>

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