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ADVOCACY GROUPS FILE COMPLAINT WITH FTC ON DATA BROKER PRACTICES

“We know private companies are reaping immense profits from violating consumer protections and selling our data without our consent. It’s time for our government to use tools at their disposal to protect our communities.”

WASHINGTON, D.C.– Today, a coalition of racial justice advocacy groups filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) alleging unfair and deceptive practices by data brokers. In the complaint, groups are asking the FTC to use their authority to rein in the collection and processing of U.S. consumer’s personal data by RELX, parent company of LexisNexis, and Thomson Reuters. Included in the complaint are public testimonies from U.S. residents whose data was collected without their consent by the named companies.

“Our complaint is just the tip of the iceberg,” said Akina Younge, Director of Movement Collaborations at Center on Race and Digital Justice. “We know private companies are reaping immense profits from violating consumer protections and selling our data without our consent. It’s time for our government to use tools at their disposal to protect our communities.”

“I was shocked when I got the 46-page packet of information about me and people around me. It had my Social Security Number – all the numbers written out, none redacted – all the different addresses where I have lived at throughout my life, I don’t think they missed a single address – emails, phone numbers, you name it. How did this company gain access to so much information about me?” – testimony from Claudia Marchán, Illinois state resident

“ICE uses these companies to come after organizers like me. They use this information to create a chilling effect, when we learn that they can just grab anything about our lives. I had no idea that buying insurance for my car would lead to all this data being shared with them.” – testimony from Maru Mora Villalpando, Washington state resident

“The FTC has the authority to investigate the unfair and deceptive practices of these companies, and it’s now a question of whether they will listen to the community concerns outlined and take action,” said Laura Rivera, attorney with Just Futures Law

The complaint was filed by the Center for Race and Digital Justice, Just Futures Law, Media Justice, Mijente, and Surveillance Resistance Lab. You can read the full complaint, testimonies, and list of demands here.
WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Today, a coalition of racial justice, reproductive rights, and community advocates met with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to discuss concerns on violations around consumer protections by the multi-billion dollar data broker industry. The following is a read-out from members present in the meeting:

“We came to D.C. on behalf of Black, brown, and immigrant community members whose voices matter but are often absent from policy conversations,” said Steven Renderos, executive director of MediaJustice. “That’s why we met with the Federal Trade Commission, to ensure their efforts are informed by the consumers they are tasked with protecting.”

“The data of almost every single resident in the U.S. has been taken by data brokers without our knowledge or consent as part of a business model that fuels policing and corporate profits,” said Mizue Aizeki, Executive Director of the Surveillance Resistance Lab. “Data broker companies routinely employ unfair and deceptive practices. This is why it’s imperative that the FTC use its authority to prevent further exploitation and harm. ”

"Data brokers are placing individuals at substantial risk, whether they are a person seeking or providing abortion care or a person seeking assistance from intimate partner violence,” said Sawyeh Esmaili, Senior Counsel for Reproductive Rights and Health at the National Women’s Law Center. “In an already escalating climate of harassment, surveillance, and criminalization, the selling of our data to third parties raises critical safety concerns that must be immediately addressed. Everyone deserves the ability to control who has access to their own data.”

Background: On May 30, Center for Race and Digital Justice, Just Futures Law, Media Justice, Mijente, and Surveillance Resistance Lab filed a complaint with the FTC alleging unfair and deceptive practices by two of the biggest data brokers, RELX and Thomson Reuters. Among the list of demands, the complaint calls for the FTC to use their authority to launch an investigation into the data broker industry practices and they order companies to delete personal data and cease using this information to train data analytics projects.

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The Surveillance Resistance Lab is a think and act tank focused on state and corporate surveillance as one of the greatest threats to migrant justice, racial equity, economic justice, and democracy. We are committed to movement building to fight for accountability and government divestment from technologies that expand systems of control and punishment in public spaces, schools, workplaces, and at/across borders.

The Center on Race and Digital Justice engages with a variety of network touch points including policy makers, scholars, activists, tech workers, and storytellers. With this community, we foster critical, sustainable, and scalable change at the intersection of race and digital justice. The Center focuses on who holds power, how to redistribute power, and the ways in which data and technology reflect power structures.