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NEWS RELEASE

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AG Hood Files Suit Against Google over Handling of Student Data

JACKSON— Attorney General Jim Hood announced today that the state has filed suit against Google Inc., over how the internet giant maintains and uses data collected from Mississippi public school students who have Google’s G Suite For Education accounts.

Google is accused of collecting personal information and search history obtained from its users in order to advance its own business interests and increase its profit, in violation of the Mississippi Consumer Protection Act.

The free, web-based tools were previously known as Google Apps for Education and were marketed by Google as a safe way for students and teachers to seamlessly collaborate and communicate across multiple internet-connected devices. Among the “tools” offered in the suite of products were Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Drive and Google Docs.

In 2015, Google signed the K-12 School Service Provider Pledge to Safeguard Student Privacy. By signing the pledge, Google promised, among other things, to “not collect, maintain, use or share student personal information beyond that needed for authorized educational/school purposes, or as authorized by the parent/student” and to “disclose clearly in contracts or privacy policies, including in a manner easy for parents to understand, what types of student personal information we collect, if any, and the purposes for which the information we maintain is used or shared with third parties.” The lawsuit alleges that Google fails to live up to its pledge and does not properly disclose the types of information it collects, maintains and uses, as well as whether and how that information is shared with third parties. Due to the multitude of unclear statements provided by Google, it is impossible to know exactly what student information Google is collecting and how Google is using that information.

“It is disturbing to think that one of the world’s most profitable corporations would try to make even more money by deceiving parents and taking advantage of Mississippi school children,” Attorney General Hood said. “Through this lawsuit, we want to know the extent of Google’s data mining and marketing of student information to third parties. I don’t think there could be any motivation other than greed for a company to deliberately keep secret how it collects and uses student information.”

(more)

While it is believed that more than half of Mississippi schools currently use Google products, the lawsuit was filed on behalf of the state, and it does not seek compensation on behalf of any schools or students. The Attorney General encouraged school administrators to thoroughly research any technology services that may be used by students, and he said it would be up to schools to determine whether they continue to using G Suite For Education.

“I have a duty to protect the rights and interests of all Mississippians,” the Attorney General said in a letter to school superintendents. “This includes holding Google accountable for any misrepresentations it has made regarding GSFE users’ private information that it processes, collects stores and uses for its own financial gain, and seeking a court order requiring Google to cease any unlawful practices.”

Mississippi’s lawsuit was filed Friday in Lowndes County Chancery Court.

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