

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

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<http://oversight.house.gov>

July 1, 2020

Mr. Brian Huseman
Vice President, Public Policy
Amazon.com, Inc.
601 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Huseman:

As demonstrations occur across the country, more and more people are confronting the reality of racial injustice in policing. No one can still claim ignorance of the fact that interactions with police are more dangerous for people of color, and police surveillance leads to more of these interactions.

In apparent solidarity with the national movement against police violence and all forms of systemic racism, Ring's parent company, Amazon, issued the following statement:¹



Many private technology companies that have been working with police have recently acknowledged the danger that police surveillance poses to people of color in America. Microsoft, IBM, and Amazon have all announced a moratorium on allowing police to use their

¹ Amazon 'Stands in Solidarity' Against Police Racism While Selling Racist Tech to Police, The Intercept (June 3, 2020) (online at <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/03/amazon-police-racism-tech-black-lives-matter/>).

facial recognition technologies.² As a subsidiary of Amazon, will Ring commit to abiding by this moratorium? Please advise our Subcommittee regarding this very important issue.

In addition, the Subcommittee is concerned that Amazon's commitment to joining "the fight against systemic racism and injustice" is undermined by Ring's continuing partnerships with law enforcement and the propagation of racism and fear that has spread on your Neighbors app.³ For these reasons, the Subcommittee is eager to review your plans for addressing these problems. Unfortunately, if acceptable solutions are not presented, it may be necessary for Ring to heed calls to end its partnerships with police and retire its Neighbors App.

The Neighbors app, which allows users to upload videos recorded by Ring's doorbell cameras, amplifies users' implicit biases. The Subcommittee is concerned that the messages that some users of Neighbors app are creating may stoke fears, prejudices, and violence, as when one user incited others to "start blasting some of these thief's [sic]."⁴ Neighbors app messages like these could result in tragedy.

The Neighbors app combines user-shared videos with data that Ring employees compile from 911 dispatch centers—sometimes available only through agreements with local law enforcement—into a geotargeted livestream footage of real and suspected crime. By seeing activity that Neighbors labels as "suspicious" or potentially criminal—without any scrutiny of the reports—people are likely to become more fearful and distrustful.⁵ Police departments across the country also have access to the app and its vast store of video and audio footage, allowing for more rapid deployment of police against people flagged as "suspicious."

Ring's nationwide surveillance network has been built through partnerships with more than 1,300 police departments.⁶ Ring reportedly works closely with local governments and police departments to promote its surveillance tools and has entered into agreements with cities to provide discounts on Ring products to their residents in exchange for city subsidies. Reports

² *Microsoft Won't Sell Police Its Facial-Recognition Technology, Following Similar Moves by Amazon and IBM*, Washington Post (June 11, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/06/11/microsoft-facial-recognition/).

³ *Amazon's Home Security Company is Turning Everyone Into Cops*, Vice (Feb. 7, 2020) (online at www.vice.com/en_us/article/qvyvzd/amazons-home-security-company-is-turning-everyone-into-cops); *Ring Must End Its Dangerous Partnerships with Police*, Electronic Frontier Foundation (June 10, 2020) (online at www.eff.org/deeplinks/2020/06/amazon-ring-must-end-its-dangerous-partnerships-police).

⁴ *Spotlight: Neighborhood Crime Apps Stoke Fears, Reinforce Racist Stereotypes, and Don't Prevent Crime*, The Appeal (Jun. 4, 2019) (online at <https://theappeal.org/spotlight-neighborhood-crime-apps-stoke-fears-reinforce-racist-stereotypes-and-dont-prevent-crime/>).

⁵ *Doorbell-Camera Firm Ring Has Partnered with 400 Police Forces, Extending Surveillance Concerns*, Washington Post (Aug. 28, 2019) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/08/28/doorbell-camera-firm-ring-has-partnered-with-police-forces-extending-surveillance-reach); *see also Cops Are Giving Amazon's Ring Your Real-Time 911 Caller Data*, Gizmodo (Aug. 1, 2019) (online at <https://gizmodo.com/cops-are-giving-amazons-ring-your-real-time-911-data-1836883867>) (discussing Ring's use of computer-aided dispatch feeds).

⁶ *Active Agency Map*, Google Maps (online at www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1eYVDPH5itXq5acDT9b0BVeQwmESBa4cB&ll=39.28665032557352%2C-77.42686001449249&z=3) (accessed June 19, 2020).

indicate that Ring also has entered into agreements with police departments to provide free Ring products for giveaways to the public.⁷ Ring reportedly tightly controls what cities and law enforcement agencies can say about Ring, requiring any public statement to be approved in advance.⁸ In one instance, Ring is reported to have edited a police department's press release to remove the word "surveillance."⁹

The Subcommittee is concerned that these partnerships give police a much wider system of surveillance than police legally could build themselves. Law enforcement agencies can view videos shared by users in the Neighbors app, request video from users through the Neighbors Portal, or request video directly from Ring.¹⁰ Once law enforcement agencies have access to consumers' data, Ring has made it clear that the agencies can use, store, and share that data however they want.¹¹

The Subcommittee is also concerned that some cities create incentives to place products like Ring's doorbell cameras in already overpoliced minority neighborhoods. Some cities are now paying residents up to \$150 to put up cameras in high-crime and low-income areas and link them to police department surveillance systems.¹² Such actions cast suspicion on the everyday actions of citizens in the poorest areas. Heavy surveillance does not make us safer; it makes us more fearful of one another, and this fear can lead to violence.

The Subcommittee previously wrote to you on February 19, 2020, raising many of these same concerns and asking you to produce documents and information by March 4, 2020. It is now four months past that deadline, and, unfortunately, you have produced none of the requested documents.

⁷ *US Cities Are Helping People Buy Amazon Surveillance Cameras Using Taxpayer Money*, Vice (Aug. 2, 2019) (online at www.vice.com/en_us/article/d3ag37/us-cities-are-helping-people-buy-amazon-surveillance-cameras-using-taxpayer-money); *Amazon's Helping Police Build a Surveillance Network with Ring Doorbells*, CNET (June 5, 2019) (online at www.cnet.com/features/amazons-helping-police-build-a-surveillance-network-with-ring-doorbells).

⁸ *Amazon's Doorbell Camera Ring Is Working with Police—and Controlling What They Say*, The Guardian (Aug. 30, 2019) (online at www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/aug/29/ring-amazon-police-partnership-social-media-neighbor).

⁹ *Amazon's Ring Barred Cops from Using 'Surveillance' to Describe Its Products*, Gizmodo (Aug. 19, 2019) (online at <https://gizmodo.com/ring-barred-cops-from-using-surveillance-to-describe-it-1837380102>).

¹⁰ *Doorbell-Camera Firm Ring Has Partnered with 400 Police Forces, Extending Surveillance Concerns*, Washington Post (Aug. 28, 2019) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/08/28/doorbell-camera-firm-ring-has-partnered-with-police-forces-extending-surveillance-reach).

¹¹ *Police Can Keep Ring Camera Video Forever and Share with Whomever They'd Like, Amazon Tells Senator*, Washington Post (Nov. 19, 2019) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/11/19/police-can-keep-ring-camera-video-forever-share-with-whomever-theyd-like-company-tells-senator).

¹² Baltimore City Ordinance, *Private Security Camera System Rebate and Voucher Program—Establishment*, Enactment #20-355 (Apr. 23, 2020) (online at <https://baltimore.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4316856&GUID=E7C4BBFC-4A9E-4BF7-8D71-32D32275EC7F>).

Therefore, I am reiterating my previous request and seek additional information, by July 15, 2020:

1. All agreements with:
 - a. cities and law enforcement agencies, including those to provide free Ring products, discounted Ring products, and access to the Neighbors Portal;
 - b. neighborhood watch groups, including those to provide free Ring products, discounted Ring products, and testimony in legal proceedings;

2. A list of:
 - a. all law enforcement agencies that have access to the Neighbors Portal, including the name and location of the agencies, the dates on which the agencies gained access to the Neighbors Portal, and whether the agencies have had contracts for Rekognition;
 - b. all instances in which law enforcement agencies have requested video footage from Ring, including the requesting agencies, descriptions of the nature of the requests (e.g., search warrant, subpoena, writ of assistance, informal request), whether Ring complied with the requests, and whether users consented or had knowledge of the footage requests;
 - c. all service providers, business partners, and third-party analytics services with which Ring has shared consumers' personal information and video footage;
 - d. all of Ring's sources of computer-aided dispatch (CAD) data, specifying whether the source is publicly available and including the specific elements of data collected from that source;

3. All documents referring or relating to:
 - a. the integration, or potential integration, of facial recognition tools, including Rekognition, in Ring products;
 - b. the use of live or stored video footage from Ring products or shared in the Neighbors app to train facial recognition tools, including Rekognition;
 - c. the integration, or potential integration, of automated license plate reader technology in Ring products;
 - d. Ring's potential partnership with Axon;
 - e. Ring's "Community Alerts" Facebook campaign;
 - f. unauthorized access by Ring employees to stored and live video footage, including any disciplinary actions taken in response;
 - g. activation, except in response to consumer requests for technical support, of video or audio recording by Ring;
 - h. research, studies, consultation, or advice Ring undertook or received about how to design the Neighbors app to encourage consumers to share footage with law enforcement;
 - i. research and studies of Ring products' effect on crime;

- j. research, studies, consultation, or advice Ring undertook or received about Ring products' and the Neighbors apps' implications for civil liberties, including but not limited to issues of privacy and racial profiling;
 - k. customer complaints regarding security vulnerabilities or breaches, privacy concerns, law enforcement requests for footage via the Neighbors app, and racial profiling related to the Neighbors app;
 - l. the heat map feature in the Neighbors Portal;
 - m. the number of ring user accounts with and without two-factor authentication engaged;
4. A description of whether you plan to:
 - a. discontinue or adjust any or all partnerships with law enforcement;
 - b. discontinue or adjust your Neighbors app to combat racism and the likelihood that your app contributes to violent interactions between police and people of color; and
 5. All documents that Ring or Amazon has produced to state attorneys general, the Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Justice, or Congress in response to investigations into Ring.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the Committee's request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Michael Cloud, Ranking Member