

# Background on CfA's Letters to Apple and Google Calling on Companies to Remove Apps from Anti-Choice Groups

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Campaign for Accountability (“CfA”), is a nonprofit watchdog group focused on public accountability and reproductive rights. CfA recently sent letters to executives at Apple and Google calling on the companies to expel from their platforms the apps for Family Research Council (“FRC”) and Susan B. Anthony List (“SBA List”). FRC’s app, STAND FIRM, and SBA List’s app, Life Impact, are operated by Political Social Media LLC, an app developer that operates around 12 conservative apps in both the App Store and Google Play.

Besides STAND FIRM and Life Impact, Political Social Media also runs apps for the National Rifle Association, President Trump’s campaign committee, and conservative parties in Canada and Australia. All of Political Social Media’s apps, are virtually identical. For each client, including SBA List and FRC, Political Social Media sets up a boilerplate social media platform where members can chat with each other, post comments on in-app newsfeeds, and play games.

*New York Times: [Republicans Find a Facebook Workaround: Their Own Apps](#)*

Political Social Media’s apps have drawn intense scrutiny because they lack basic privacy protections. For instance, the company operated an app for the Vote Leave campaign in Great Britain, and a parliamentary committee later questioned the “data privacy concerns raised” by the app. Additionally, the *New York Times*, *NBC News*, and *BuzzFeed*, have all examined how the company uses its apps to mine the personal data of its users. All of Political Social Media’s apps, including Life Impact and STAND FIRM, appear to violate Apple’s App Store Review Guidelines and the Google Play Developer Distribution Agreement.

## *Apple*

Political Social Media, on behalf of SBA List and FRC, appears to be violating three core provisions of the App Store Review Guidelines. First, Apple prohibits app developers from misusing the contact information of its users for purposes such as building an outside database or contacting people in a users’ phonebook -- the foundation of Political Social Media’s business model. The company has boasted about these prohibited tactics when marketing its apps to clients.

*BuzzFeed: [The Apps For Ireland's Anti-Abortion Campaigns Allow User Data To Be Shared With The NRA](#)*

Second, Political Social Media relies on identical app templates for each of its client’s apps, including Life Impact and STAND FIRM, despite Apple’s prohibition on “apps created from a commercialized template or app generation service.” *TechCrunch* reported in December 2017 that Political Social Media’s apps likely would be ensnared by these rules and removed from the App Store, but Apple has yet to act.

Third, Apple's guidelines stipulate that if an app "doesn't include significant account-based features," people should be allowed to use the app without being required to log in. Nevertheless, Political Social Media's apps, including Life Impact and STAND FIRM, require users to sign in to have access to an app's features.

### *Google*

Political Social Media's app similarly appear to violate the Google Play Developer Distribution Agreement and Google's Developer Program Policies. First, Political Social Media does not provide an "adequate privacy notice" for its users, since the company does not provide links to the privacy policies for the organizations, like SBA List and FRC, that hire Political Social Media to run their apps.

*NBC News: [Trump's New App Wants You – And Your Data](#)*

Second, Political Social Media appears to be violating Google's repeated instructions to be transparent in handling users' personal information. Political Social Media has stated publicly that the purpose of its apps is to collect users' phonebooks and location data in order to deliver messages from its clients to their associates but does not disclose this information to users.

Third, Google requires developers to use only "the permissions necessary for [the] app to work." Yet Political Social Media appears to violate this policy by enticing users to give away their personal information by granting them access to more features in the app or awarding them points.

Fourth, Google requires organizations like SBA List and FRC to submit apps to Google Play in their own name. Political Social Media, however, operates Life Impact and STAND FIRM through its developer account and SBA List has not submitted the app. *TechCrunch* has also pointed out this discrepancy, but Google has yet to act.

*TechCrunch: [Google Follows in Apple's Footsteps by Cleaning up its Play Store](#)*

*Campaign for Accountability is nonprofit watchdog organization that uses research, litigation, and aggressive communications to expose misconduct and malfeasance in public life and hold those who act at the expense of the public good accountable for their actions.*