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Attorney General Josh Stein Reaches \$391.5 Million Multistate Settlement with Google

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Attorney General Josh Stein



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Largest multistate attorney general privacy settlement in U.S. history

(RALEIGH) Attorney General Josh Stein today announced a \$391.5 million multistate settlement with Google over its location tracking practices related to Google Account settings. The attorneys general found that Google violated state consumer protection laws by misleading consumers about its location tracking practices since at least 2014. North Carolina’s share of the settlement is \$17,621,737.90. Attorney General Stein was on the executive committee of states investigating Google and negotiating this settlement, which is the largest multistate attorney general privacy settlement in U.S. history.

“People should have the ability to decide how much of their information they want to share with tech companies,” said Attorney General Josh Stein. “Google took that ability away from people unlawfully and gained access to North Carolinians’ personal data and location information. I’m pleased that Google will be more transparent with its users moving forward, and I’m proud to have helped lead negotiations of this settlement.”

Location data is a key part of Google’s digital advertising business and among the most sensitive and valuable personal information it collects. Google uses the personal and behavioral data it collects to build detailed user profiles and target ads on behalf of its advertising customers. Even a limited amount of location data can expose a p

routines and can be used to infer personal details.

The attorneys general opened the Google investigation following a 2018 *Associated Press* article that revealed Google “records your movements even when you explicitly tell it not to.” The article focused on two Google account settings: Location History and Web & App Activity. Location History is “off” unless a user turns on the setting, but Web & App Activity, a separate account setting, is automatically “on” when users set up a Google account, including all Android phone users. Specifically, Google caused users to be confused about the scope of the Location History setting, the fact that the Web & App Activity setting existed and also collected location information, and the extent to which consumers who use Google products and services could limit Google’s location tracking by adjusting their account and device settings.

The settlement requires Google to be more transparent with consumers about its practices. Google must:

- 1. Show additional information to users whenever they turn a location-related account setting “on” or “off”;
- 2. Make key information about location tracking unavoidable for users (i.e., not hidden); and
- 3. Give users detailed information about the types of location data Google collects and how it’s used at an enhanced “Location Technologies” webpage.

The settlement also limits Google’s use and storage of certain types of location information and requires Google account controls to be more user-friendly.

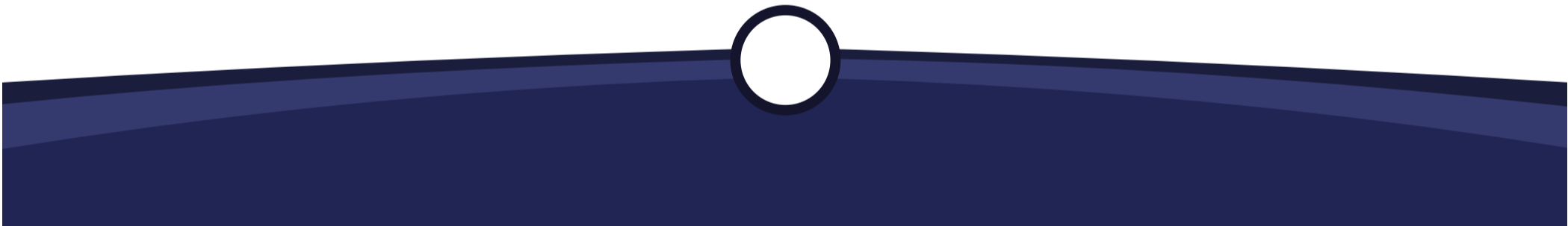
Attorney General Stein is joined in this settlement by the Attorneys General of Oregon, Nebraska, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

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