

United States Senate

May 16, 2018

COMMITTEES:
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
AGING
INDIAN AFFAIRS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable Joseph J. Simons
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Mr. Simons:

I am writing to you to encourage that, as you fulfill your new leadership role of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), you work to ensure that the Commission makes protecting consumers from potential abuses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) a top priority. With the advent of groundbreaking technologies that have capabilities beyond our wildest imaginations, we have a great responsibility to uphold our values and protect the American people. AI represents one of the most significant breakthroughs of our time, and it must be met with prudent response from every part of the federal government – including the FTC.

AI is an exciting new technology that has countless applications. From helping companies increase efficiency to improving traffic and safety, AI can increase economic growth and drastically improve people's lives. At the same time, however, all technologies are vulnerable to unintended consequences and abuse by bad actors. As the agency tasked with protecting consumers, the FTC has a broad mandate under the Federal Trade Commission Act to “prevent unfair methods of competition and unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce.”¹ It is vital that the FTC fulfills this mandate as it relates to developments in AI.

As you may know, recent reports regarding the development of digital personal assistants have raised concerns about the potential for misuse of this technology. Some of these devices can now mimic human speech beyond detectability.² While these devices could be used for countless purposes, such as helping people make appointments, there is also concern about possible “deceptive” uses, such as perpetrating scams by mimicking the voice of a friend or relative asking for money.

This example is only a tiny fraction of what AI is used for every day, and these uses will grow exponentially in the near future. Technology, including AI, has advanced at a rapid pace in

¹ 15 U.S.C. §§ 41-58

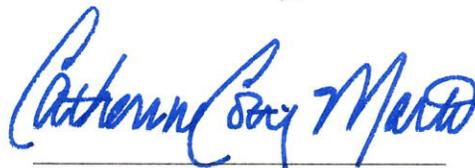
² Google's AI sounds like a human on the phone — should we be worried? The Verge. (May 9, 2018)
<https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/9/17334658/google-ai-phone-call-assistant-duplex-ethical-social-implications>

recent years, often making it difficult to ensure that rules and consumer protections keep pace with developments in the technology industry. An approach that combines strong protections for consumers while allowing the technology to thrive will allow the industry to solve problems, improve people's lives, and ensure that all people enjoy the fruits of technological advancements in the 21st century.

These are large and complex challenges, but I am confident that with proper leadership the FTC can fulfill its role as the consumer protection agency and work to ensure consumers are not subject to "unfair or deceptive acts" committed with the help of AI. As the Commission moves forward under your new leadership, I hope you will work with my office, the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, and Congress generally to help identify problems and solve issues that arise from the development of this exciting technology and make protecting Americans from misuses of AI a top priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

CC:

Maureen K. Ohlhausen, Commissioner

Noah Joshua Phillips, Commissioner

Rohit Chopra, Commissioner

Rebecca Kelly Slaughter, Commissioner