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EPIC DEFENDS PRIVACY OF FACEBOOK USERS:
FILES COMPLAINT WITH FTC

Leading Privacy Organization says that Recent Changes by Facebook to
User Privacy Settings are Unfair and Deceptive

WASHINGTON DC – The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), joined by nine privacy and consumer organizations, today filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) charging that Facebook’s recent changes to user privacy settings violate federal consumer protection law.

The EPIC complaint urges the Trade Commission to open an investigation into the recent changes made by Facebook to the privacy settings of Facebook users and to require Facebook to restore privacy safeguards.

“This is the most significant case now before the Federal Trade Commission,” said Marc Rotenberg, EPIC Executive Director. “More than 100 million people in the United States subscribe to the Facebook service. The company should not be allowed to turn down the privacy dial on so many American consumers.”

On November 19 and December 9, Facebook changed key privacy settings and required Facebook users to go through a “transition tool” before they could obtain access to their accounts.

According to the EPIC complaint, far more user information became publicly available as result of this change. EPIC also said that more personal information will become available to third party application developers as a result of the changes to the privacy settings.

The EPIC complaint cites widespread opposition to the changes by Facebook users, news organizations, bloggers, and security experts.

Ed Felten, a security expert and Princeton University professor, wrote, “As a user myself, I was pretty unhappy about the recently changed privacy control. I felt that Facebook was trying to trick me into loosening controls on my information.”

Danny Sullivan, the editor of Search Engine Land and an expert in search engine design, wrote on his blog, “I was disturbed to discover things I previously had as options were no longer in my control.”

The EPIC complaint also cites the creation of new Facebook user groups, such as “Against The New Facebook Privacy Settings!” and “Facebook! Fix the Privacy Settings.”

Among the organizations supporting the EPIC complaint are the American Library Association, the Center for Digital Democracy, the Consumer Federation of America, FoolProof Financial Education, Patient Privacy Rights, Privacy Activism, the Privacy Rights Now Coalition, the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, and the U. S. Bill of Rights Foundation

The EPIC is a public interest research center based in Washington, DC. EPIC focuses public attention on emerging privacy and civil liberties issues. Previous EPIC complaints to the FTC have led to the largest judgment in the Commission’s history, substantial changes to online authentication techniques, and the recent decision of the Department of Defense to stop selling a spyware program to military families.

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RESOURCES:

EPIC’s Complaint, “In re Facebook,” filed December 17, 2009

<http://www.epic.org/privacy/inrefacebook/EPIC-FacebookComplaint.pdf>

Background on EPIC Complaint, “In re Facebook”

<http://www.epic.org/privacy/inrefacebook>

EPIC, Facebook and Privacy

<http://epic.org/privacy/facebook/>