

# Massachusetts to receive \$9.3 million from settlement with Google over location tracking practices

“Attorney General Maura Healey today announced that she has joined a coalition of 40 attorneys general in reaching a \$391.5 million settlement with Google for misleading consumers about its location tracking practices. This is the largest multistate data privacy settlement ever reached by attorneys general in the history of the United States. Massachusetts is expected to receive \$9.3 million from the settlement.

Today’s settlement concludes an investigation by the attorneys general that found that Google violated state consumer protection laws by misleading consumers about its location tracking practices since at least 2014. Specifically, Google caused users to be confused about two account settings that control data collection of the users’ location – “Location History” and “Web & App Activity” – 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.

“Technology companies need to be upfront with users about how and when their data is tracked and shared, especially when it comes to location information which can reveal personal information about people’s lives,” said AG Healey. “This unprecedented agreement holds Google accountable for these deceptive practices, requires more transparency, and ensures more consumer control over what information is used.”

Location data is a key part of Google’s digital advertising business. Google uses the personal and behavioral data it

collects to build detailed user profiles and target ads on behalf of its advertising customers. Location data is among the most sensitive and valuable personal information Google collects – even a limited amount of location data can expose a person’s identity and routines. This data has the potential to reveal intimate and sensitive details, including, as Google has acknowledged, whether a person has sought reproductive health care.

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,” including when the “Location History” setting is turned off. “Web & App Activity,” a separate account setting that also tracks location, is automatically turned “on” when users set up a Google account, including all Android phone users. The attorneys general allege that consumers were confused about the scope of the “Location History” setting and did not know the “Web & App Activity” setting existed.

Today’s settlement requires Google to be more transparent with consumers about its practices, including by:

- Showing additional information to users whenever they turn a location-related account setting “on” or “off”;
- Making key information about location tracking unavoidable (i.e., not hidden);
- Giving users detailed information about the types of location data Google collects and how it’s used at an enhanced “Location Technologies” webpage;
- Giving users the ability to disable a location-related account setting and delete the location information stored by that setting without needing to navigate to separate webpages; and
- Automatically deleting location information collected through Web and App Activity after 30 days.

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.

Joining AG Healey in filing the settlement are the attorneys general of Oregon, Nebraska, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. The final settlement was also joined by Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.”-Mass.gov.