

US regulators asked to probe game bills

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A visitor tries out a computer game on a mobile phone at the Gamescom trade fair in 2010. Two members of Congress asked US regulators on Tuesday to look into a newspaper report that children had rung up huge bills buying virtual products in games on mobile devices.

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The Washington Post reported Tuesday that an eight-year-old girl had racked up a \$1,400 bill from Apple buying virtual products such as "smurfberries" in the Capcom Interactive game Smurfs' Village on the [iPhone](#).

Smurfs' Village and similar games can be downloaded for free from Apple's [iTunes](#) store but users are billed when they make so-called "in-app purchases."

Apple reimbursed the money in the case of the child cited by the Post and a spokeswoman for the California company told the newspaper that Apple requires a password to make in-app purchases in a bid to avoid such incidents.

Representative Edward Markey, a Democrat from Massachusetts, asked the [Federal Trade Commission](#) (FTC) to look into the report.

"I am concerned about how these applications are being promoted and delivered to consumers, particularly with respect to children, who are unlikely to understand the ramifications of in-app purchases," Markey said in a letter.

Markey asked the FTC to "assess current industry activities in this area to determine whether they constitute unfair or deceptive acts or practices."

Senator Mark Pryor also wrote the FTC saying "children, in particular, appear to be confused by in-app purchases, leaving parents with an unexpected bill for virtual smurfberries, snowflakes or other products.

"In the end, it would appear that these app companies may be the ones having all the fun and games at our children's expense," the Democrat from Arkansas said.

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