

Washington state sues Google, Facebook over campaign ad data

June 5 2018, by Gene Johnson



In this Nov. 28, 2017, file photo, Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson speaks at a news conference in Seattle. Ferguson is suing Google and Facebook, saying the companies failed to maintain information about political advertising as required by state law. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File)

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson on Monday sued Google and Facebook, saying the companies failed to maintain information about political advertising as required by state law.

Washington law requires the companies to maintain [information](#) about buyers of [political ads](#), the cost, how they pay for it, and the candidate or ballot measure at issue, according to the lawsuits, filed in King County Superior Court on Monday. The companies also must make that information available to the public upon request.

Ferguson said neither Facebook nor Google did so, even though Washington candidates and political committees have spent nearly \$5 million to advertise on those platforms in the past decade.

"Washington's political advertising disclosure laws apply to everyone, whether you are a small-town newspaper or a large corporation," Ferguson said in a statement. "Washingtonians have a right to know who's paying for the political [advertising](#) they see."

Social media companies have been under pressure to be more transparent when it comes to political ads, including issue ads, which factored prominently in Russia's efforts to interfere in the 2016 U.S. elections.

Facebook has started allowing users to search an archive of political ads. It announced last month that it was expanding its ad disclosure requirements, which include labels which users can click to learn more about who paid for the ads and how many people saw them.

"Attorney General Ferguson has raised important questions and we look forward to resolving this matter with his office quickly," Rob Leathern, Facebook's director of product management, said in an emailed statement.

Last month Google said it would do a better job of verifying the identity of political ad buyers in the U.S. by requiring a copy of a government-issued ID and other information. Google would also require the

disclosure of who is paying for the ad.

"We are committed to transparency and disclosure in [political advertising](#)," Google said in a statement Monday. "We are currently reviewing the complaint and will be engaging with the Attorney General's office."

The lawsuits in Washington state cited reporting by the Seattle alternative newspaper The Stranger, which sought the information from Google and Facebook last December, to no avail.

The state is seeking fines and legal fees.

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