

Apple removes Ice tracking apps after pressure from Trump administration

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[Apple](#) has removed an app from its App Store that uses crowdsourcing to flag sightings of US immigration agents after facing pressure from [Donald Trump's administration](#).

IceBlock, a free iPhone-only app that lets users anonymously report and monitor activity by Immigration and Customs Enforcement ([Ice](#)) officers, was no longer available on Friday. The app's developer said last month that it had more than 1 million users.

"We just received a message from Apple's App Review that #ICEBlock has been removed from the App Store due to 'objectionable content'," the developer said in a social media post. "The only thing we can imagine is this is due to pressure from the Trump Admin. We have responded and we'll fight this!"

Even though it has been removed from the app marketplace, those who have already downloaded the app should still be able to use it. Downloads of apps including IceBlock have surged as the [Trump administration](#) steps up immigration enforcement with surprise raids. The technology has come under fire from authorities after agents were targeted.

"We created the App Store to be a safe and trusted place to discover apps," Apple said in a statement. "Based on information we've received from law enforcement about the safety risks associated with ICEBlock, we have removed it and similar apps from the App Store."

The app, first launched in April, was founded by indie musician turned entrepreneur Joshua Aaron. It's a Waze-like app that allows users to alert others when they see Ice agents within a 5-mile radius of their current location. When Aaron first tried to put it on the Apple App Store, the release was pushed back for three weeks as he went back-and-forth with the company's legal team and other "higher-ups" about the parameters of the app – including whether Aaron would be able to protect the privacy of IceBlock users.

"There were conversations almost on a daily basis with senior people there saying: 'Is this even legal? Can we do this? Are we going to get in trouble for having this?'" Aaron [previously told](#) the Guardian.

The founder said Apple had a particularly difficult time understanding how Aaron, who did not intend to profit off the app and thus would not collect any data, would protect the privacy of the app's users.

"Apple had a hard time wrapping their head around it, because they were like: 'What do you mean you're never going to make money? What do you mean you're never going to track anything?'" Aaron said. "I was like: 'Yeah, that's the point. I don't care.' I don't care about people's data as far as being able to get analytics or track them or sell their data. I don't care about any of that. I care about keeping people safe. That is literally the whole point. Eventually they allowed it on."

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In June – within two months of the app’s launch – Kristi Noem, the US homeland security secretary, said the app and its founder were “obstructing justice”. At the time, Noem suggested prosecuting CNN for reporting on the app. Months later, Aaron’s wife, Carolyn Feinstein, lost her job at the Department of Justice – a move the duo said they believe was [“retaliation”](#) for the creation and operation of IceBlock.

In a July interview on Fox News, Pam Bondi, the US attorney general, said crowdsourced apps that allow people to communicate about the location of law enforcement officers is not allowed, specifically referring to IceBlock.

“We are looking at him and he better watch out because that’s not a protected speech,” Bondi said at the time, referring to Aaron.

Aaron responded to Bondi’s threat directly, telling the [Guardian](#): “Please, come on. I better watch out? Why? I’m protected under the first amendment. This is perfectly legal, and I made sure of that.”

Yet there are many apps that track law enforcement and remain available to users, such as Waze or Google Maps. Those apps, in addition to providing navigation, alert drivers of potential locations of speed traps.

Officials said last month that a gunman who opened fire on an Ice facility in Dallas had searched for apps that tracked the presence of Ice agents.