



FBI, Apple hearing over unlocking phone canceled

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March 22, 2016

Apple and the U.S. Department of Justice will argue in court Tuesday about whether a judge should require the tech giant help the Federal Bureau of Investigation unlock an iPhone used by the San Bernardino, California, mass shooter.

In a filing [PDF] submitted late Monday in a central California federal court, the Feds asked for a crunch hearing due to take place on Tuesday be vacated and proceedings be suspended at least until next month.

The FBI has asked to postpone Tuesday's hearing so it can determine whether or not it will be able to unlock the iPhone using this newly discovered method without compromising the data.

UPDATE at 5:40 p.m., Monday, March 21, 2016: The judge in the case also "stayed" or put off the court's order that Apple comply and help feds crack Farook's phone.

"We did not expect to be in this position, at odds with our own government", Cook said Monday upon releasing iOS 9.3, the company's newest mobile operating system.

"An external forensics company, with hardware capabilities, is likely copying the NAND storage off the [iPhone's chipset] and frequently recopying it back to the device in order to brute force the PIN..."

The US law enforcement agency is reportedly on the brink of backing down in a heated battle with Apple after its core argument was exposed as a fallacy.

"It's a fight over the future of high-tech surveillance, the trust infrastructure undergirding the global software ecosystem, and how far technology companies and software developers can be conscripted as unwilling suppliers of hacking tools for governments", wrote Julian Sanchez, a surveillance law expert at the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington. We must first test this method to ensure that it doesn't destroy the data on the phone, but we remain cautiously optimistic.

He said that would essentially amount to the government being handed a "master key" to devices.

Before unveiling the new products Monday, Cook vowed to continue to protect customers' privacy as the company continues its bitter fight with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Apple said that if the government was successful in getting into the phone, which might involve taking advantage of previously undiscovered vulnerabilities, it hoped officials would share information on how they did so.

Analysts and tech blogs say Apple also may unveil a new model of the iPad Pro, which the company introduced past year with several features - like a detachable keyboard and stylus - designed for business users.

In a statement, the Justice Department said its only interest has always been gaining access to the information on the phone and that it had continued to explore alternatives even as litigation began.

Apple did not respond to a request for comment.

In the court case, Pym had ordered Apple to create new software allowing FBI investigators to disable security mechanisms on Farook's iPhone so that they could guess an infinite number of passwords and break in. Would that happen just one day before the much-anticipated court hearing? The investigators had another idea: The phone company would give them some spare phone lines, right next to the gamblers' lines to let the investigators use another, more discreet, tracking technique.