

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
Alexandria Division



MICROSOFT CORPORATION, a)
Washington corporation,)
)
Plaintiff,)
v.)
)
JOHN DOES 1-2 CONTROLLING A)
COMPUTER NETWORK)
THEREBY INJURING PLAINTIFF)
AND ITS CUSTOMERS,)
)
Defendants.)
)
)
)
)
)

Civil Action No: 1:20CV730

FILED UNDER SEAL PURSUANT
TO LOCAL CIVIL RULE 5

**BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF MICROSOFT’S MOTION FOR PROTECTIVE ORDER
TEMPORARILY SEALING DOCUMENTS**

Microsoft submits the following memorandum in support of its Motion for a Protective Order Sealing Documents.

BACKGROUND

Microsoft has filed a Complaint and an *Ex Parte* Application for an Emergency Temporary Restraining Order and Order to Show Cause re Preliminary Injunction (“TRO Application”) to prevent the activities of John Doe Defendants 1 and 2 (collectively “Defendants”) who are engaged in harmful and malicious Internet activities directed at Microsoft, its customers, and the general public. Microsoft seeks *ex parte* relief in the TRO Application that will cease the irreparable harm resulting from Defendants’ conduct. Microsoft seeks *ex parte* relief under seal because advance public disclosure or notice of the requested relief would allow Defendants to evade such relief and further prosecution of this action, thereby perpetuating the irreparable harm at issue. The reasons for Microsoft’s request are set forth in

detail in the TRO Application filed concurrently herewith. Therefore, Microsoft requests that this case and all documents filed in this case be sealed pending execution of the temporary restraining order sought in Microsoft's TRO Application. Microsoft's requested sealing order is narrowly tailored to impose the least restriction on the public's right of access to information as possible. Microsoft requests that all sealed documents be immediately unsealed upon execution of the temporary restraining order.

ARGUMENT

The First Amendment provides for public access to the courts, but that right of access is not without limits. *Va. Dep't of State Police v. Wash. Post*, 386 F.3d 567, 575 (4th Cir. 2004). Indeed, "the trial court has supervisory power over its own records and may, in its discretion, seal documents if the public's right of access is outweighed by competing interests." *In re The Knight Publ'g Co.*, 743 F.2d 231, 235 (4th Cir. 1984); *see also Rushford v. New Yorker Magazine*, 846 F.2d 249, 253 (4th Cir. 1988) (stating that to place documents under seal, the court must determine "that the denial [of access] serves an important governmental interest and that there is no less restrictive way to serve that governmental interest").

Under Fourth Circuit law, the district court must do the following prior to sealing court records: (1) give public notice of the request to seal and allow interested parties a reasonable opportunity to object, (2) consider less drastic alternatives to sealing the documents, and (3) provide specific reasons and factual findings supporting its decision to seal the documents and for rejecting the alternatives. *Ashcraft v. Conoco*, 218 F.3d 282, 288 (4th Cir. 2000) (citing *In re Knight Pub.[sic] Co.*, 743 F.2d 231, 235-36 (4th Cir. 1984)); *In re U.S. for an Order Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. Section 2703(D)*, 707 F.3d 283, 294 (4th Cir. 2013) (finding no error to seal documents and noting "[t]he mere fact that a case is high profile in nature does not necessarily

justify public access”).

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure also recognize the important public and judicial interest in protecting confidential business information. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)(1)(G) (empowering courts to order “that a trade secret or other confidential research, development, or commercial information not be revealed or be revealed only in a specified way”). Likewise, Supreme Court and Fourth Circuit authority recognize the necessity of non-public *ex parte* proceedings. *See Granny Goose Foods, Inc. v. Brotherhood of Teamsters & Auto Truck Drivers, Lcal No. 70*, 415 U.S. 423, 439(1974) (“Ex parte temporary restraining orders are no doubt necessary in certain circumstances. . . .”); *Hoechst Diafoil Co. v. Nan Ya Plastics Corp.*, 174 F.3d 411, 422 (4th Cir. 1999) (“[T]emporary restraining orders may be issued without full notice, even, under certain circumstances, *ex parte*[.]”); *Bell v. True*, 356 F. Supp. 2d 613, 617 n.3 (W.D. Va. 2005) (“Material allowed to be filed *ex parte* will of course be kept sealed, to prevent its disclosure outside of the court.”); *see also Media Gen. Operations, Inc. v. Buchanan*, 417 F.3d 424, 429 (4th Cir. 2005) (upholding sealing of *ex parte* search warrants based on risk that evidence will be destroyed).¹

In this case, Microsoft’s rights and interests in protecting its ability to obtain emergency *ex parte* temporary relief, and the necessity of sealing its pleadings is paramount over any competing public interest to *immediate* access to the information Microsoft requests be sealed. If Microsoft’s papers are not sealed, the relief sought would very likely be rendered fruitless and there is a substantial risk Defendants would destroy evidence. Defendants are sophisticated

¹ This Court has recognized that “private interests, based not on the content of the material to be sealed, but instead on the relationship of the parties, might also have the potential to override even the stronger First Amendment presumptive right of public access.” *Level 3 Commc’ns, LLC v. Limelight Networks, Inc.*, 611 F. Supp. 2d 572, 583 (E.D. Va. 2009) (Davis, J.).

criminals engaged in a complex scheme to unlawfully obtain access to personal and confidential information of Microsoft customers. Specifically, it describes an online criminal network that sends phishing emails containing deceptive messages concerning the global COVID-19 pandemic or other socially engineered lures in order to induce targeted victims to click on malicious links in those emails. These phishing emails are designed to look like they come from an employer or other trusted source. Once the victims click on the malicious links, they are led to servers which present the victims with a malicious Web Application (“Web App”).² The malicious Web App interacts with Microsoft’s Office 365 services, as described more fully below. Having convinced the victims that the original phishing email was sent by a trusted source, the criminals then cause the victims to erroneously believe that the Web App also originates from the same trusted source and, most importantly, is approved or published by Microsoft. As a result, targeted victims are deceived into clicking a button that grants the malicious Web App, and therefore the criminals, access to the victims’ Office 365 account including the account contents, such as email, contacts, notes and material stored in the victims’ OneDrive for Business cloud storage space and corporate SharePoint document management and storage system. The attacker may also be able to access and alter account settings as the attacker has full control over the account. Until the Web App is disabled or token revoked, the attacker will have continued access to the Office 365 account. Declaration of Peter Anaman In Support Of Microsoft’s TRO Application (“Anaman Decl.”) ¶3. Defendants’ techniques are designed to resist technical mitigation efforts, eliminating straightforward technical means to curb the injury being caused. *Id.* ¶50. For this reason, providing notice to Defendants in advance of redirection

² For clarity, the references here to a “Web App” do not relate to mobile apps. Rather, the Web App is software running on servers controlled by Defendants and which can interact with and obtain access to Microsoft Office 365 accounts.

of the domain names at issue would render attempts to disable the infrastructure futile. *Id.*

Further, when Defendants become aware of efforts to mitigate or investigate their activities, they take steps to conceal their activities and to conceal the injury that has been caused to victims, making it more difficult for victims to adequately assess the damage or take steps to mitigate that injury going forward. *Id.*

Given Microsoft's actions against similar unlawful Internet activity, even disclosing that Microsoft has initiated this case risks giving Defendants the opportunity to change their infrastructure. Based on similar actions, it is likely that Defendants in this case will take similar steps to destroy evidence and move their infrastructure if they are given notice of the pending legal action against them.

The harm that would be caused by the public filing of Microsoft's Complaint and moving papers would far outweigh the public's right to access to that information. There is no need for the public to have immediate access to the Complaint, TRO Application, and supporting documents while Microsoft is seeking *ex parte* relief which will only be effective if these materials remain under seal. Applying the balancing test set forth in governing law demonstrates that Microsoft's interest in obtaining effective relief outweighs any immediate public right to disclosure.

Microsoft only seeks to seal such information for a limited period of time, until after effective *ex parte* temporary relief has been obtained. After such point, sealing will no longer be necessary, and Microsoft will immediately commence efforts to provide Defendants notice of the preliminary injunction hearing and service of the Complaint—at which point, all documents will be unsealed and the public will be given full access to these proceedings. Microsoft, upon execution of the *ex parte* relief, will file with the Clerk of the Court a Notice that the temporary

restraining order has been executed.

Should, however, the Court decide not to grant the *ex parte* relief Microsoft requests, Microsoft asks that such materials remain sealed for an indefinite period, as public disclosure or notice absent the *ex parte* relief requested would facilitate Defendants' harmful and malicious Internet activities.

Given the limited period of sealing as an alternative that balances the public interest in access with Microsoft's important interests in maintaining these materials under seal for a brief period of time, granting the instant request to seal is warranted and consistent with the legal framework for addressing this issue.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, for all the foregoing reasons, Microsoft requests that this case and the following documents in particular be kept under seal in accordance with Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)(1) and Local Civil Rule 5, pending execution of the *ex parte* relief sought in the TRO Application:

1. The instant Motion for Protective Order Sealing Documents and accompanying documents, including the Brief in support of this Motion;
2. The declaration of Gabriel M. Ramsey in Support of Motion for Protective Order Sealing Documents;
3. Microsoft's *Ex Parte* Application for an Emergency Temporary Restraining Order and Order to Show Cause re Preliminary Injunction and accompanying documents;
4. The Declaration of Peter Anaman in Support of Microsoft's *Ex Parte* Application for an Emergency Temporary Restraining Order and Order to Show Cause re Preliminary Injunction and attachments thereto;
5. [Proposed] Temporary Restraining Order and accompanying documents.

Microsoft respectfully requests that the case and these materials be sealed pending execution of the *ex parte* temporary relief sought in Microsoft's Application for TRO. Microsoft respectfully requests that immediately upon the execution of the temporary restraining order, the

instant case be unsealed and the foregoing documents be filed in the public docket. Upon execution of the *ex parte* relief, Microsoft will file with the Clerk of the Court a Notice that the temporary restraining order has been executed. Microsoft further requests that upon execution of the temporary restraining order, Microsoft be permitted to disclose such materials as it deems necessary, including to commence its efforts to provide Defendants notice of the preliminary injunction hearing and service of the Complaint.

Microsoft respectfully requests that should the Court decide not to grant the *ex parte* temporary relief requested in Microsoft's TRO Application, that the materials be sealed indefinitely.

Dated: June 30, 2020

Respectfully submitted,



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