Dear New gTLD Program Committee,

As we move towards the launch of the first new gTLD registries, scheduled for the end of this year, significant concerns remain surrounding the delegation of both singular and plural versions of the same string.

It is our belief that allowing both singular and plural versions of the same string to proceed would be harmful to consumers, harmful to businesses, and detrimental to the credibility of ICANN and the new gTLD program. This is because the existence of identical second-level domains and their corresponding email addresses on these TLDs would likely lead to user confusion as well as invite spoofing and other phishing attacks. In addition, allowing the coexistence of singular and plural versions of the same string would set a troubling precedent for future gTLD rounds, encouraging bad actors to purposely target variants of popular existing TLDs in order to profit from user confusion.

While the International Center for Dispute Resolution (ICDR) has ruled in certain cases that singular and plural versions of the same string are indeed confusingly similar (.sport/.sports, .pet/.pets, .game/.games, .tour/.tours), in other cases, it has ruled in the opposite manner (.car/.cars, .hotel/.hotels). Such inconsistent findings on the precisely identical legal issues run contrary to the notions of fairness, transparency, and non-discrimination underlying the policy recommendations of the GNSO on the introduction of new gTLDs. They also cast doubt on the appropriate implementation of the Applicant Guidebook, Section 3.5.1, which expressly states that “[s]tring confusion exists where a string so nearly resembles another that it is likely to deceive or cause confusion.”

Given this problematic lack of consistency in the ICDR findings, we respectfully ask that ICANN publish the specific objective criteria used to judge string similarity, and then allow for an appeal system to allow applicants to challenge the ICDR decisions on singular-plural TLDs based on such criteria.

Time is of the essence, as the first registries are slated to launch at the end of this year, so we ask that immediate steps are taken to address this important issue.

Best,

TBD