

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

August 19, 2022

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230

Dear Mr. Chew:

We write regarding your company's response to the surge of online threats against law enforcement following the execution of a court-authorized search warrant by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at former President Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club. We are concerned that reckless statements by the former President and Republican Members of Congress have unleashed a flood of violent threats on social media that have already led to at least one death and pose a danger to law enforcement officers across the United States. We urge you to take immediate action to address any threats of violence against law enforcement that appear on your company's platforms.

On August 8, 2022, the FBI conducted a search at Mr. Trump's private club in connection with the former President's potential violations of the Espionage Act, the Presidential Records Act, and other federal laws. Following the search, former President Trump and House Republicans lashed out at the FBI and law enforcement more generally. While FBI agents were executing the court-approved search warrant, former President Trump released a statement claiming his home was "under siege, raided, and occupied by a large group of FBI agents."¹ He later claimed, without evidence, that the FBI may have planted evidence.² House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy accused the Department of Justice of being "weaponized" against former President Trump. Minority Whip Steve Scalise suggested that the FBI agents executing the warrant had gone "rogue."³ Republican Members of Congress wrote on Twitter, "We must

¹ *FBI Executes Search Warrant at Trump's Mar-a-Lago in Document Investigation*, CNN (Aug. 9, 2022) (online at www.cnn.com/2022/08/08/politics/mar-a-lago-search-warrant-fbi-donald-trump/index.html).

² Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (Aug. 10, 2022) (online at <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/108798211943189544>).

³ See *McCarthy Threatens to Probe Garland After Trump FBI Raid*, The Hill (Aug. 8, 2022) (online at <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/3593582-mccarthy-threatens-to-probe-garland-after-trump-fbi-raid/>); *Asked About Threats to FBI, Scalise Claims Without Evidence that Agents Went 'Rogue'*, Washington Post (Aug. 11, 2022) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/08/11/trump-fbi-search-scalise-republicans/).

destroy the FBI,” “Lock Them Up!!!” and “Defund the corrupt FBI!”⁴ Former Vice President Mike Pence felt compelled to call out these statements by Republican leaders and implored them that “these attacks on the F.B.I. must stop.”⁵

These statements coincided with a spike in social media users calling for civil war and violence toward law enforcement. One user on Truth Social posted, “Fuck the Feds! The Second Amendment is not about shooting deer! Lock and load!” Another wrote, “Arm yourselves! We are about to enter into Civil War!”⁶ On August 12, 2022, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a Joint Intelligence Bulletin warning about this sharp rise in threats, noting an “increase in violent threats posted on social media against federal officials and facilities.”⁷ The head of the FBI Agents Association warned that the threats against FBI agents are “real” and “imminent.”⁸

Unfortunately, this rhetoric has already led to attacks against federal law enforcement, including an FBI field office in Cincinnati, Ohio. Following the FBI’s execution of the search warrant at Mar-a-Lago, a now-deleted post from a Truth Social account bearing the attacker’s name implored others to “be ready for combat” and to “respond with force.”⁹ On August 11, the attacker attempted to breach the FBI’s Cincinnati field office while wearing body armor and armed with an AR-15-style weapon. After exchanging gunfire with law enforcement officers, he was fatally shot.¹⁰

On August 15, a Pennsylvania man was arrested and charged with making threats of violence against FBI personnel. He wrote on the social media platform Gab, “If You Work For

⁴ Rep. Paul Gosar, DDS (@RepGosar), Twitter (Aug. 8, 2022) (online at <https://twitter.com/RepGosar/status/1556821907726630915>); Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (@RepMTG), Twitter (Aug. 15, 2022) (online at <https://twitter.com/RepMTG/status/1559166615454990337>); Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (@RepMTG), Twitter (Aug. 15, 2022) (online at <https://twitter.com/RepMTG/status/1559242579375439873>).

⁵ *Pence Calls on Republicans to Stop Assailing the F.B.I. After Mar-a-Lago Search*, New York Times (Aug. 17, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/us/politics/pence-fbi-jan-6.html).

⁶ Anti-Defamation League, *Search of Former President’s Florida Home Sparks Online Calls for Violence* (Aug. 8, 2022) (online at www.adl.org/resources/blog/search-former-presidents-florida-home-sparks-online-calls-violence).

⁷ *FBI and DHS Warn Threats to Federal Law Enforcement Have Spiked Since Mar-a-Lago Search*, NBC News (Aug. 14, 2022) (online at www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/fbi-dhs-warn-threats-federal-law-enforcement-spiked-wake-mar-lago-sear-rcna43024); Ken Klippenstein (@kenklippenstein), Twitter (Aug. 13, 2022) (online at <https://twitter.com/kenklippenstein/status/1558597533198327808>).

⁸ *Threat Against Federal Law Enforcement ‘Imminent,’ Official Says*, KKTV (Aug. 16, 2022) (online at www.kktv.com/2022/08/16/threat-against-federal-law-enforcement-imminent-official-says/).

⁹ *Man Shot Dead after Trying to Storm FBI Office Posted a ‘Call to Arms’*, New York Post (Aug. 12, 2022) (online at <https://nypost.com/2022/08/12/suspect-who-tried-to-storm-fbi-posted-a-call-to-arms/>).

¹⁰ *Ohio Man Was on the F.B.I.’s Radar for Months*, New York Times (Aug. 12, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/2022/08/12/us/ricky-shiffer-fbi-cincinnati.html); *Armed Man Who Was at Capitol on Jan. 6 is Fatally Shot after Firing into an FBI Field Office in Cincinnati*, NBC News (Aug. 11, 2022) (online at www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/armed-man-shoots-fbi-cincinnati-building-nail-gun-flees-leading-inters-rcna42669).

The FBI Then You Deserve To Die.” He also wrote, “Every single piece of shit who works for the FBI in any capacity, from the director down to the janitor who cleans their fucking toilets deserves to die. You’ve declared war on us and now it’s open season on YOU.”¹¹

FBI agents have also been targeted by individuals seeking to expose the agents’ identities and personal information online. On August 12, 2022, a former White House aide to President Trump released the personal information of two individuals he identified as FBI agents involved in the search warrant on social media—a practice known as doxxing. The names and personal information of the agents, as well as information about one of the agent’s wife and child, were posted to Truth Social and Telegram. The former Trump Administration official wrote, “Hope he doesn’t get a good night’s sleep for the rest of 2022.” This information has since been removed from Truth Social.¹²

Violent rhetoric and personal threats and attacks toward law enforcement officers have deadly consequences. One retired FBI special agent explained, “All of this rhetoric is being thrown around without any consideration for possible consequences,” noting: “All that does is stir up that minority within the base that aren’t satisfied with just words, they actually want to act it out.”¹³

The Committee strongly supports the First Amendment rights of all Americans to speak out about the actions of their government and law enforcement matters, including on social media platforms. However, threats and incitements of deadly violence are unacceptable and against the law. The Committee is seeking to understand how your company responds when users post threats against law enforcement, how your company plans to prevent your platform from being used to incite violence against law enforcement personnel, and whether legislative reform is necessary to protect law enforcement personnel and increase coordination with federal authorities.

For all these reasons, please provide written answers to the following questions by September 2, 2022:

1. Since August 8, 2022, how many threats against federal law enforcement has your company identified on its platform?
 - a. How many of these threats were removed from your platform? How many were reported to law enforcement?

¹¹ Department of Justice, *Press Release: Man Arrested for Making Threats of Violence Against FBI* (Aug. 15, 2022) (online at www.justice.gov/opa/pr/man-arrested-making-threats-violence-against-fbi).

¹² *Ex-Trump Aide Sics MAGA Lackeys on Alleged FBI Agents’ Families*, Daily Beast (Aug. 12, 2022) (online at www.thedailybeast.com/ex-trump-aide-sics-maga-lackeys-on-alleged-fbi-agents-families).

¹³ *GOP Trump Supporters Escalate Dark Rhetoric After FBI Search*, PBS (Aug. 12, 2022) (online at www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/gop-trump-supporters-escalate-dark-rhetoric-after-fbi-search).

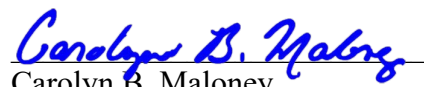
- b. How many of the threats reported to law enforcement were related to the search warrant executed on former President Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence, to the FBI, or to the Department of Homeland Security?
 2. What are your company's policies, procedures, and practices for removing threats from your platform and reporting threats to law enforcement?
 - a. What is the threshold for a threat to be removed from your platform, and how does your company determine this threshold?
 - b. What resources does your company use in identifying threats on your platform, including, but not limited to the number of employees assigned to content moderation?
 3. Has your platform experienced an increase in the number of threats related to law enforcement or a change in the nature or specificity of these threats since August 8, 2022? If so, please explain.

Please produce the following documents by September 2, 2022:

1. All documents regarding your company's policies, procedures, and practices in addressing threats and incitement of violence on your platform, including, but not limited to, training materials; and
2. All advertisements shown alongside posts that were reported to law enforcement or removed by your company for threatening law enforcement.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the Committee's request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

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The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security