

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

August 19, 2022

Mr. Pavel Durov
Chief Executive Officer

Telegram FZ-LLC
Business Central Towers
Tower A, Office 1003/1004
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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Dear Mr. Durov:

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

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).

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 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

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/).

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*, KKTU (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/>).

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 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.

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-rna42669).

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).

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?
 - 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:

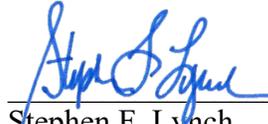
1. All documents regarding your company's policies, procedures, and practices in addressing threats and incitement of violence on your platform, including, but not limited to, training materials; and
2. All advertisements shown alongside posts that were reported to law enforcement or removed by your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

The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

Responding to Oversight Committee Document Requests

1. In complying with this request, produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. Produce all documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
2. Requested documents, and all documents reasonably related to the requested documents, should not be destroyed, altered, removed, transferred, or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
3. In the event that any entity, organization, or individual denoted in this request is or has been known by any name other than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
4. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, thumb drive, or secure file transfer) in lieu of paper productions.
5. Documents produced in electronic format should be organized, identified, and indexed electronically.
6. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
 - a. The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
 - b. Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.
 - c. If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.
 - d. All electronic documents produced to the Committee should include the following fields of metadata specific to each document, and no modifications should be made to the original metadata:

BEGDOC, ENDDOC, TEXT, BEGATTACH, ENDATTACH, PAGECOUNT, CUSTODIAN, RECORDTYPE, DATE, TIME, SENTDATE, SENTTIME, BEGINDATE, BEGINTIME, ENDDATE, ENDTIME, AUTHOR, FROM, CC, TO, BCC, SUBJECT, TITLE, FILENAME, FILEEXT, FILESIZE, DATECREATED, TIMECREATED, DATELASTMOD, TIMELASTMOD,

INTMSGID, INTMSGHEADER, NATIVELINK, INTFILPATH, EXCEPTION,
BEGATTACH.

7. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, zip file, box, or folder is produced, each should contain an index describing its contents.
8. Documents produced in response to this request shall be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when the request was served.
9. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph(s) or request(s) in the Committee's letter to which the documents respond.
10. The fact that any other person or entity also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
11. The pendency of or potential for litigation shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
12. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(d), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and any statutory exemptions to FOIA shall not be a basis for withholding any information.
13. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552a(b)(9), the Privacy Act shall not be a basis for withholding information.
14. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full by the specified return date, compliance shall be made to the extent possible by that date. An explanation of why full compliance is not possible shall be provided along with any partial production.
15. In the event that a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document: (a) every privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author, addressee, and any other recipient(s); (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other; and (f) the basis for the privilege(s) asserted.
16. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, identify the document (by date, author, subject, and recipients), and explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
17. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, produce all documents that would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.

18. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data, or information not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery.
19. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
20. Two sets of each production shall be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff and one set to the Minority Staff. When documents are produced to the Committee, production sets shall be delivered to the Majority Staff in Room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 2105 of the Rayburn House Office Building.
21. Upon completion of the production, submit a written certification, signed by you or your counsel, stating that: (1) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control that reasonably could contain responsive documents; and (2) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

Definitions

1. The term “document” means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, data, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, communications, electronic mail (email), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other inter-office or intra-office communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape, or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.
2. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, mail, releases, electronic

message including email (desktop or mobile device), text message, instant message, MMS or SMS message, message application, or otherwise.

3. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information that might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neutral genders.
4. The term “including” shall be construed broadly to mean “including, but not limited to.”
5. The term “Company” means the named legal entity as well as any units, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, limited liability companies, trusts, subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities over which the named legal entity exercises control or in which the named entity has any ownership whatsoever.
6. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual’s complete name and title; (b) the individual’s business or personal address and phone number; and (c) any and all known aliases.
7. The term “related to” or “referring or relating to,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with, or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
8. The term “employee” means any past or present agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, detailee, fellow, independent contractor, intern, joint adventurer, loaned employee, officer, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, special government employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.
9. The term “individual” means all natural persons and all persons or entities acting on their behalf.