Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2022

Elon Musk
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Musk,

We are writing to better understand the current state and future of Twitter's transparency policies regarding its safety practices. You have made public commitments to increase transparency and keep existing content moderation policies in place initially, but recent decisions, including those related to account verification and personnel, run contrary to these promises.[1] Specifically, employees dedicated to transparent algorithms, accessibility, child safety workflows, and human rights have been laid off, as have engineers tasked with maintaining core infrastructure.[2]

These changes represent massive alterations to the information environment. As policymakers, we depend on independent academic research and insights from civil society to understand digital services, their technical affordances and safety policies, and their impact on public health, free expression, and national security. Similarly, consumers, parents, and advertisers need to know if companies are investing in processes that are in line with the values and promises they profess in their terms and conditions as well as public statements.

It's for this purpose that in March we introduced comprehensive platform transparency legislation, *The Digital Services Oversight and Safety Act*. This legislation would create an *Office of Independent Research Facilitation* tasked with ensuring data pertaining to content moderation decisions and algorithms can be securely shared and analyzed.[3]

Twitter currently has several tools for sharing data with researchers including the Decahose API and Academic Research product track.[4] These tools, along with Twitter's unique privacy context,

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[1] *See* Rachel Lerman*, Here's what Elon Musk has said about his plans for Twitter,* THE WASHINGTON POST (Oct. 5, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/05/10/elon-musk-twitter-plans/. *See also* Sheila Dang, Katie Paul, and Paresh Dave, *Twitter lays off staff, Musk blames activists for ad revenue drop*, REUTERS (Nov. 4, 2022), https://www.reuters.com/technology/twitter-start-layoffs-friday-morning-internal-email-2022-11-04/.
[2] Alex Heath and Mia Sato*, Elon Musk's Twitter layoffs leave whole teams gutted,* THE VERGE (Nov. 4, 2022), https://www.theverge.com/2022/11/4/23439790/elon-musk-twitter-layoffs-trust-and-safety-teams-severance.
[3] H.R.6796 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Digital Services Oversight and Safety Act of 2022, H.R.6796, 117th Cong. (2022), https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6796.
[4] *Decahose API*, TWITTER, https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api/enterprise/decahose-api/overview/decahose. *See also Academic Research access*, TWITTER, https://developer.twitter.com/en/products/twitter-api/academic-research.

have made Twitter one of the most studied social media platforms globally and have led to a better understanding of content labels, bot detection, and news literacy.[5] Additionally, Twitter is a signatory to the European Commission's *Code of Practice on Disinformation*, which includes measures for empowering researchers and increasing transparency.[6]

With this in mind, we ask for a response to the following by December 2, 2022:

1. Do you plan to keep the APIs and product tracks that enable researcher access to data available for the foreseeable future? If yes, do you expect pricing changes and how will you ensure that prices do not make access prohibitive?
2. Prior to October 27, 2022, how many employees were working on maintaining the Decahose API and Academic Research product track? How many employees remain in these positions?
3. Due to an intentional decision or unintentional technical failure, have the features of the Decahose API or Academic Research product track changed since October 27, 2022? If yes, what led to those changes?
4. As Twitter continues to make structural changes, how will you ensure that both the terms and conditions associated with these tools are enforced and that user data rights are considered and protected?
5. If the research community begins publishing studies about the impact of Twitter's recent policy changes under your leadership, will you commit to not retaliating with tactics such as limiting access?
6. In September of this year, Twitter opened membership to the *Twitter Moderation Research Consortium* to a broad set of researchers studying content moderation.[7] Is this program still operational? What plans are in place to ensure such a program delivers on its goals?

Sincerely,

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

Sean Casten
Member of Congress

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[5] Jon Bateman, et al., *Measuring the Efficacy of Influence Operations Countermeasures: Key Findings and Gaps From Empirical Research*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE (Sep. 21, 2021), https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/09/21/measuring-efficacy-of-influence-operations-countermeasures-key-findings-and-gaps-from-empirical-research-pub-85389. *See also* Joshua A. Tucker, et al., *Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature*, SSRN ELECTRONIC JOURNAL (Mar. 21, 2018), https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139.
[6] *The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation*, EUROPEAN COMMISSION (Jul. 4, 2022), https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation. *See also Signatories of the 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation*, EUROPEAN COMMISSION (Nov. 5, 2022), https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/signatories-2022-strengthened-code-practice-disinformation.
[7] Yoel Roth, *The Twitter Moderation Research Consortium is now open to researchers*, TWITTER (Sep. 22, 2022), https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2022/twitter-moderation-research-consortium-open-researchers.