

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

August 1, 2023

Elon Musk  
Owner and Chief Technology Officer  
X Corp.  
1355 Market Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94103

Linda Yaccarino  
Chief Executive Officer  
X Corp.  
1355 Market Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Musk, and Ms. Yaccarino,

We write to express our deep concerns about the proliferation of hate, harassment, and extremism on X and the company's series of troubling decisions that appear calculated to harass, silence, and suppress research and accountability into this issue. Independent researchers and advocates, including those at the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), regularly study trends of potentially harmful behavior on social media platforms and post articles detailing their findings. This is true of X as well as of its competitors, including Meta, Google, TikTok, and others. However, under your leadership, X is taking a hostile stance toward those efforts, further contributing to existing concerns about X's abilities to effectively address the harms that exist on your platform.

After Mr. Musk purchased X on October 27, 2022, some of his first actions were to lay off trust and safety workers,<sup>1</sup> dissolve the Trust and Safety Council,<sup>2</sup> and restore banned accounts

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Conger, Ryan Mac, and Mike Isaac, *Confusion and Frustration Reign as Elon Musk Cuts Half of Twitter's Staff*, The New York Times (Nov. 4 2022) <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/technology/elon-musk-twitter-layoffs.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Associated Press, *Musk's Twitter has dissolved its Trust and Safety Council*, NPR (December 12, 2022) <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/12/1142399312/twitter-trust-and-safety-council-elon-musk>

of misogynists<sup>3</sup> and Neo-Nazis.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, this has coincided with a documented rise in hate speech and extremism on X. This has been documented by the CCDH, which found a 119% jump in anti-LGBTQ ‘grooming rhetoric’ on X,<sup>5</sup> by U.S. research institutions,<sup>6</sup> and even by the Australian government.<sup>7</sup> Independent research is critical to understanding the proliferation of hate speech and extremism online, and it has raised legitimate and serious questions regarding X’s business practices since Mr. Musk’s acquisition.

In March, we sent a letter<sup>8</sup> to your company, then known as “Twitter,” inquiring about its troubling decision to shutter free access for researchers to the Twitter API. However, we have yet to receive a response. In the meantime, X’s actions have hamstrung attempts by academic researchers to research not only X itself, but also use social media data to conduct countless and wide-ranging research projects in the public interest.<sup>9</sup> It has been more than four months since we sent our initial letter – more than enough time to sufficiently and thoroughly answer the questions we posed.

Independent researchers play an outside role in providing transparency and accountability into not just X, but all social media platforms. However, by filing suit against the CCDH,<sup>10</sup> X is uniquely resisting those important efforts and stifling unbiased research in the public interest. Therefore, in light of X’s most recent attempt to avoid transparency, we ask the same questions once again.

Please answer the following questions, for which we requested a response on April 11, 2023:

1. Why did X change the API access and pricing structure, in particular for the Academic Research API?

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<sup>3</sup> Irina Ivanova, *These formerly banned Twitter accounts have been reinstated since Elon Musk took over*, CBS News (November 21, 2022)

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/twitter-accounts-reinstated-elon-musk-donald-trump-kanye-ye-jordan-peterson-kathy-griffin-andrew-tate/>

<sup>4</sup> Nikki McCann Ramirez, *Elon Brings One of America’s Most Prominent Nazis Back to Twitter*, Rolling Stone (December 2, 2022) <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/elon-musk-twitter-reinstates-neo-nazi-andrew-anglin-account-1234640390/>

<sup>5</sup> See *Toxic Twitter - How Twitter Makes Millions from Anti-LGBTQ+ Rhetoric*, the Center for Countering Digital Hate, <https://counterhate.com/research/toxic-twitter-anti-lgbtq/>

<sup>6</sup> Hickey, Daniel & Schmitz, Matheus & Fessler, Daniel & Smaldino, Paul & Murić, Goran & Burghardt, Keith. (2023). Auditing Elon Musk's Impact on Hate Speech and Bots.

<sup>7</sup> See Molly Bohannon, *Australia Could Fine Twitter Up To \$475,000 A Day Over Hate Speech Concerns*, Forbes (Jun 21, 2023) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mollybohannon/2023/06/21/australia-could-fine-twitter-up-to-475000-a-day-over-hate-speech-concerns/?sh=14d8869d6c0b>

<sup>8</sup> Trahan, *Lawmakers Press Musk on Twitter’s New Paid API Access*, LORI TRAHAN (March 20, 2023) <https://trahan.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2825>

<sup>9</sup> Justine Calma, *Twitter just closed the book on academic research*, The Verge (May 31, 2023) <https://www.theverge.com/2023/5/31/23739084/twitter-elon-musk-api-policy-chilling-academic-research>

<sup>10</sup> Twitter, *Protecting the Public’s Right to Free Expression* (July 31, 2023) [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2023/a-new-era-of-transparency-for-twitter1](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2023/a-new-era-of-transparency-for-twitter1)

2. Will researchers that were previously approved for the Academic Research API be grandfathered into an equivalent level of access in the new APIs?
3. Please list all differences, especially decreases, in the types of data and volume of data between the Academic Research API, new paid basic API, new paid API Pro and the new enterprise API tiers.
4. Do you plan on providing free or discounted API access for academic researchers? If so, when would that API be released, what would the cost be, and how would it differ from existing APIs? If you have no plans for this, why not?
5. Will you commit to not increasing the price of and not decreasing the level of access provided by your new API platform?
6. Will X commit to ending the practice of retaliating against journalists and researchers that publish negative reports about X?

And please answer the following additional question.

1. Has X successfully decreased the amount of content in violation of its terms of service on its platform, including hate speech and extremism?
  - a. If so, have any independent third parties verified this claim, and what research have they generated in support of it?

We ask that you respond to all seven of these questions no later than August 15, 2023.

Sincerely,



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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



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Adam B. Schiff  
Member of Congress



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Sean Casten  
Member of Congress