

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2023

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

Dear Mr. Musk,

We are writing to inquire about recently planned changes in Twitter’s API access and pricing, and its impact on academic researchers conducting research on online platforms. Your initial announcement to shutter free access to the Twitter API by February 9th,¹ your subsequent pivot on February 8th announcing a new form of free API access, paid basic access for certain usages, and deprecation of the Premium API,² and most recently a delay without a specified release date for the new API platform that has not received an update since February 17th have created a great deal of confusion and uncertainty amongst developers and researchers who rely on consistent access to a stable API for their work.³ This stands in contradiction to your past public commitments to make Twitter more transparent,⁴ including Twitter’s sign-on of the European Commission’s *Code of Practice on Disinformation*, which includes a commitment to empower researchers with better and wider access to data.⁵

The planned replacement of Twitter’s free Academic Research API access with a \$100 per month “low level usage” basic tier API access raises concerns of restricting researchers from pursuing projects about online safety⁶ and slowing data scientists’ humanitarian efforts such as search and rescue missions in the Turkey earthquake.⁷ It is also unclear how Twitter would approve “good” bots for access to a modified free version of the API.⁸ Additionally, the absence

¹ See Twitter Dev (@TwitterDev), TWITTER (Feb. 2, 2023, 1:05 AM), <https://twitter.com/TwitterDev/status/1621026986784337922>.

² Twitter Dev (@TwitterDev), TWITTER (Feb. 8, 2023, 6:43 PM), <https://twitter.com/TwitterDev/status/1623467615539859456>.

³ Twitter Dev (@TwitterDev), TWITTER (Feb. 17, 2023, 6:56 PM), <https://twitter.com/TwitterDev/status/1626732269174943745>.

⁴ 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/>.

⁵ *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>.

⁶ *Publications*, HATELAB (2022), <https://hatelab.net/publications/>.

⁷ Vera Bergengruen, *Twitter’s Internal Chaos Is Slowing Turkey Earthquake Relief Efforts, Volunteers Say*, TIME (Feb. 11, 2023), <https://time.com/6254500/turkey-earthquake-twitter-musk-rescue/>.

⁸ Steve Dent, *Elon Musk says Twitter will offer a free API tier for ‘good’ bots*, ENGADGET (Feb. 6, 2023), <https://www.engadget.com/elon-musk-says-twitter-will-offer-a-free-api-tier-for-good-bots-091022655.html>.

of an effective start date for the new API platform amidst recent Twitter outages further emphasizes the lack of clarity and stability of forthcoming API changes.

A key concern is the newly planned pricing structure of enterprise API access, starting at \$42,000 per month for the cheapest version and scaling up to \$210,000 for the most comprehensive package.⁹ If researchers need the kind of access provided in these enterprise packages to produce the same quality of work using the previous Academic Research API, it would severely limit the number of research projects that can be conducted. The rate of over 17,500 academic papers produced since 2020 based on data accessed through Twitter’s API would quickly de-accelerate, especially as the new access parameters in the planned enterprise API constitute less than a third of Twitter’s previously free API access.¹⁰

We wrote to you last November on the importance of the Academic Research API to inform research providing insights into the effects of digital services on people’s lives, and our legislative efforts on this front in the *Digital Services Oversight and Safety Act*.¹¹ In response to that letter, we received assurances that you would not retaliate against researchers or journalists criticizing Twitter, which we promptly called into question when multiple technology reporters were suspended from Twitter later that day.¹² This track record coupled with the recently planned API changes called out in this letter highlight our growing concern over Twitter’s commitment to transparency and researcher data access.

With this in mind, we ask for a response to the following by April 3, 2023:

1. Why is Twitter changing the API access and pricing structure, in particular for the Academic Research API?
2. Will researchers that are already 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 free API, new paid basic API, and the new enterprise API tiers.
4. Do you plan on providing free or discounted API access for academic researchers after releasing your new API platform? 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. What is the approval process for determining access to a modified free version of the API for Twitter account bots “providing good content”? Would bots that could objectively report negative information about Twitter be deemed as providers of “good content”?

⁹ Chris Stokel-Walker, *Twitter’s \$42,000-per-Month API Prices Out Nearly Everyone*, WIRED (Mar. 10, 2023), <https://www.wired.com/story/twitter-data-api-prices-out-nearly-everyone/>.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Trahan, *Casten Demand Answers from Musk on Future of Twitter Transparency Policies*, LORI TRAHAN (Nov. 18, 2022), <https://trahan.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2683>.

¹² Lori Trahan (@RepLoriTrahan), TWITTER (Dec. 15, 2022, 8:54 PM), <https://twitter.com/RepLoriTrahan/status/1603569307937644546>.

7. Will Twitter commit to ending the practice of retaliating against journalists and researchers that publish negative reports about Twitter?

Sincerely,



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress