

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 22, 2022

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

Dear Mr. Musk:

We have serious concerns regarding reports of Twitter terminating a large majority of its contractors working domestically and abroad.<sup>1,2</sup> These layoffs may have harmful and long-lasting consequences for user safety across the platform, especially for Spanish-language and other non-English language users.

Social media companies, including Twitter, have long outsourced content moderation, one of the most difficult and critical responsibilities on the platform, to overseas contractors.<sup>3</sup> Twitter tasks these workers with reviewing illegal, harmful, and traumatic content in order to ensure the safety of the platform's users. Twitter relies on these contractors for critical language skills and a deep understanding of the cultural context of the market to ensure users are protected from harassment, scams, and content that violates the platform's existing policies.

All users deserve the same level of protection from harassment, fraud, and illegal activity regardless of the language they speak at home. Despite this core principle, online platforms have regularly failed to consistently enforce their existing policies across non-English languages, including Spanish.<sup>4</sup> These gaps in enforcement leave communities vulnerable to bad actors who specifically target these languages with harassment, fraud and disinformation.<sup>5</sup> This was particularly damaging during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Spanish-language users in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> and abroad<sup>7</sup> were inundated with disinformation about the virus and vaccination efforts. Reports of a spike in racial harassment<sup>8</sup> over the past weeks on Twitter proves that this issue requires immediate attention. As such, we are deeply concerned that Twitter may have fired critical staff working to protect users who speak these languages. This comes in the wake of other news that Twitter may

---

<sup>1</sup> Casey Newton and Zoë Schiffer, "Elon only trusts Elon", *Platformer*, November 14<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.platformer.news/p/elon-only-trusts-elon>

<sup>2</sup> Lora Kolodny, Ashley Capoot, "Twitter cuts a large number of contract workers without giving internal teams a heads up", *CNBC*, November 13<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/13/twitter-suddenly-cuts-large-number-of-contract-workers.html>

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Dwoskin, Jeanne Whalen and Regine Cabato, "Content moderators at YouTube, Facebook and Twitter see the worst of the web — and suffer silently", *The Washington Post*, July 25<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/07/25/social-media-companies-are-outsourcing-their-dirty-work-philippines-generation-workers-is-paying-price/>

<sup>4</sup> Kari Paul, "Disinformation in Spanish is prolific on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube despite vows to act", *The Guardian*, October 6<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/oct/06/disinformation-in-spanish-facebook-twitter-youtube>

<sup>5</sup> Tiffany Hsu, "Misinformation Swirls in Non-English Languages Ahead of Midterms", *The New York Times*, October 12<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/12/business/media/midterms-foreign-language-misinformation.html>

<sup>6</sup> Jessica Guynn and Coral Murphy Marcos, "COVID-19 crisis: Vaccine conspiracy theories, hoaxes in Spanish targeting Hispanic community breed fear, hesitancy", *USA Today*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2021/03/16/facebook-whatsapp-covid-vaccine-misinformation-spanish-hispanic-hesitancy/4711556001/>

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Herrera-Peco, Beatriz Jiménez-Gómez, Romero Magdalena, Carlos Santiago Romero Magdalena, Juan José Deudero, María García-Puente, María García-Puente and María García-Puente "Antivaccine Movement and COVID-19 Negationism: A Content Analysis of Spanish-Written Messages on Twitter", *Vaccines* 2021, 9, 656., <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines9060656>

<sup>8</sup> David Klepper, "Report: Tweets with racial slurs soar since Musk takeover", *The Associated Press*, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/elon-musk-technology-business-government-and-politics-2907d382db132cfd7446152b9309992c>

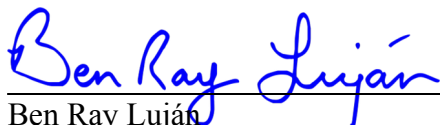
have already undermined users' safety on the platform as a result of other recent layoffs,<sup>9</sup> the departure of Twitter's Global Head of Safety & Integrity,<sup>10</sup> and the elimination of teams responsible for overseeing its ethical AI and algorithmic transparency initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

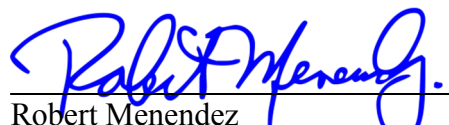
These workers provided a critical service to Twitter and its users, and reports of their mass and abrupt termination raises serious concerns. Please provide information regarding how Twitter plans to enforce its policies and provide its non-English language users with the level of service and protections they deserve.

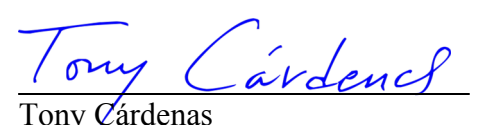
1. How many staff and contractors has Twitter cut who were previously responsible for content moderation? Please provide an account of the staffing level both prior to November 2022, and after the staffing cuts broken down by the following:
  - Country in which the employee is permanently stationed; and
  - Language fluency and markets served.
2. Following the reported staffing cuts, will Twitter maintain the amount of content that it reviews in its original language? What was this ratio prior to, and immediately following the change in staffing?
3. How will you ensure that the algorithmic processes detecting illegal content and harmful material that otherwise violates Twitter's policies are equally effective across all languages in which the platform operates?
4. What support services, including mental health counseling, are currently available to content moderators globally? What percentage of content moderators use these support services? Do you intend to change any of those offerings as part of ongoing restructuring at Twitter?
5. Twitter recently announced an expansion of its curation program to Latin America, Spain and the US.<sup>12</sup> How will the most recent layoffs impact these efforts?

We look forward to your response, which we request by December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Sincerely,

  
Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator

  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

  
Tony Cardenas  
Member of Congress

<sup>9</sup> Kate Conger, Ryan Mac, Mike Isaac, "Confusion and Frustration Reign as Elon Musk Cuts Half of Twitter's Staff", *The New York Times*, November 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/technology/elon-musk-twitter-layoffs.html>

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Menn, Cat Zakrzewski, Faiz Siddiqui, Nitasha Tiku, Drew Harwell, "Twitter's content moderation head quits as departures alarm the FTC", *The Washington Post*, November 10<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/11/10/twitter-security-resignations/>

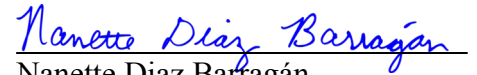
<sup>11</sup> Taylor Hatmaker, "Elon Musk just axed key Twitter teams like human rights, accessibility, AI ethics and curation", *TechCrunch*, November 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://techcrunch.com/2022/11/04/elon-musk-twitter-layoffs/>

<sup>12</sup> Twitter Latin America, "Twitter's curation program with AFP expands to LATAM, Spain, and the US", *Twitter Blog*, October 27<sup>th</sup> 2022, [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/product/2022/twitter-curation-program-afp-expands-spain-latam-us](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/product/2022/twitter-curation-program-afp-expands-spain-latam-us)



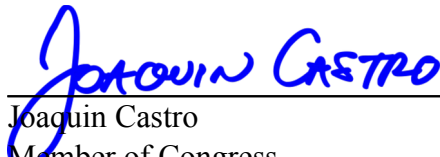
---

Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



---

Nanette Diaz Barragan  
Member of Congress



---

Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress



---

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress



---

Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress