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July 1, 2026

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Sent via electronic mail

RE: Meta's Retaliatory Termination of Two Anonymous Whistleblowers Cooperating with Senator Grassley and the Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Senator Grassley and Senator Durbin:

We write to inform you that Meta Platforms, Inc. ("Meta" or the "Company") has recently terminated two anonymous whistleblowers following their cooperation with Senator Grassley's office and the Senate Judiciary Committee, in furtherance of this Committee's oversight mission.

The terminated whistleblowers, Joshua DeFriez and William Sevedge, are represented by Whistleblower Aid, as counsel for their whistleblowing activities including assisting in oversight investigations, and by the firm Katz Banks Kumin LLP as counsel with respect to their employment with and termination from Meta. We are contacting you on their behalf to advise you of Meta's latest crackdown against whistleblowers who have sounded the alarm over the Company's disregard for child safety risks,[1] and to request further investigation into Meta's unlawful retaliation against them.

As you are aware, Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge began working at Meta as User Experience ("UX") Researchers in Spring and Summer of 2022, respectively. Mr. DeFriez worked principally on virtual reality ("VR") products research, while Mr. Sevedge worked on research pertaining to Meta's "Wearables" products. Each consistently received exemplary performance evaluations during their time at the Company. Over time, they became increasingly alarmed by Meta's disinterest in safety controls; by the Company's intentional suppression of research into whether its products pose safety and privacy risks to users in general, and women and young children in particular; and by the Company's intentional and programmatic attempts to suppress any data about the use of its products by children under the age of thirteen.

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[1] *See, e.g.,* Jon Swaine and Naomi Nix, *Meta suppressed research on child safety, employees say*, The Washington Post (Sept. 8, 2025), https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2025/09/08/meta-research-child-safety-virtual-reality/.

When Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge repeatedly raised their concerns to managers within the Company, they were met with opposition, censored when raising concerns to fellow employees, and expressly instructed to avoid pursuing research that could subject Meta to liability for failing to adequately with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), 15 U.S.C. § 91, *et seq.*, and other statutes. As our clients' concerns grew and they witnessed Meta prioritizing the Company's legal and reputational risk over the safety of users, including young children[2] Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge made the difficult decision to come forward as whistleblowers. Concerned about the impact on their jobs, reputations, and careers, they decided to do so anonymously.

On May 14, 2025, Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge, along with four former Meta employees, submitted a Disclosure to Congress ("Disclosure") regarding harmful and deceptive practices at Meta with regarding the dangers posed to the public by Meta's platforms and products—including its VR headsets, augmented reality glasses, and its "Metaverse," as well as its more popular products like Instagram and Facebook. The Disclosure contained copies of Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge's anonymized declarations (submitted under their pseudonyms, "Charlie" and "Delta", respectively), and troves of documents they obtained in the course of their work. The Disclosure and supporting documentation led to coverage in *The Washington Post*,[3] and dozens of other news outlets worldwide in September 2025.

Meta has been focused on unmasking the identities of our whistleblower clients ever since. In November 2025, Meta submitted inquiries about our clients' identities to Dr. Jason Sattizahn, their former colleague who blew the whistle publicly about these issues. The court sustained Dr. Sattizahn's objection to responding to their inquiries. Undeterred, Meta then sought to use its February 2026 cross-examination of Dr. Sattizahn, during proceedings in *New Mexico v. Meta Platforms, Inc.*,[4] to ask him to confirm Charlie's and Delta's identities.

Meta's efforts to unmask Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge were indicative of the retaliatory culture created by Meta's leaders and their longstanding campaign to discredit and malign whistleblowers as "leakers." As *The Verge* reported in February 2025, Meta Chief Technology Officer Andrew Bosworth at that time complained to employees about the "tremendous number of leaks" from the Company, stressing the futility of whistleblower reporting:

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[2] *See, e.g.* Swaine and Nix, *supra* at n.1 ("In one 2023 message exchange, a Meta lawyer advised a user-experience researcher that 'due to regulatory concerns,' he should avoid collecting data that showed children were using its VR devices.").

[3] *Id.*

[4] In that case, a jury ultimately found Meta liable for "misleading consumers about the safety of its platforms and endangering children," and awarded the State of New Mexico $375 million in damages. *New Mexico Department of Justice Wins Landmark Verdict Against Meta*, New Mexico Dep't of Justice (Mar. 24, 2026), https://nmdoj.gov/press-release/new-mexico-department-of-justice-wins-landmark-verdict-against-meta/.

> "There's a funny thing that's happening with these leaks," Bosworth said during his Q&A earlier this week (a recording of which I obtained). "When things leak, I think a lot of times people think, 'Ah, okay, this is leaked, therefore it'll put pressure on us to change things.' The opposite is more likely."

Alex Heath, *Meta goes to war with leakers*, The Verge (Feb. 7, 2025), https://www.theverge.com/608933/meta-war-with-leakers-bosworth.

Soon thereafter, the *Gazeteer SF* reported in March 2025 that Meta was building out a new team to "hunt for insider threats" at Meta, with the outlet connecting the crackdown to the "heavy scrutiny" fueled by concerned employees' whistleblower reporting.[5]

Unintimidated by Meta's response to whistleblowers, our clients continued to cooperate with Congress. They believed that, as whistleblowers, they would be protected by this body. Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge's colleagues Dr. Sattizahn and Cayce Savage, who shared their safety concerns, testified before this Committee's Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law during its September 9, 2025, hearing entitled, "Hidden Harms: Examining Whistleblower Allegations that Meta Buried Child Safety Research." (They were referred to as "Alpha" and "Beta" in the Disclosure statement). Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge continued to work with and to provide information anonymously to Congressional staffers, including in Chairman Grassley's office, ahead of this Committee's (since postponed) June 23, 2026, hearing on Meta and other social media companies' risks to children and families.[6]

Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge's determination to report to this Committee the dangers that Meta's practices pose to the health and welfare of the public in general, and to underaged children in particular, have come at significant personal cost: Meta has terminated them both.

On January 13, 2026, Meta terminated Mr. DeFriez from his position, effective March 20, 2026. The evidence strongly demonstrates that his termination was in retaliation for his whistleblowing to this Committee. When *The Washington Post* published its September 2025 coverage of the whistleblower disclosures, Mr. DeFriez shared it in a post on the Company's internal employee platform. In response, Meta's Human Resources (HR) team quickly deleted his post. When Mr. DeFriez complained to his manager about HR's actions, his manager informed him that HR had apparently been monitoring him for the past seven months due to his complaints about internal censorship of employee communications. That news precipitated a stress-induced flare up of a chronic health condition, causing Mr. DeFriez to go out on protected medical leave. Upon returning from leave in early January, Mr. DeFriez's manager instructed him to do no additional work. He was later told that his role was eliminated due to a "re-organization," even though, to his knowledge, he was the only member of his team laid off.

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[5] Megan Rose Dickey, *Meta is assembling a new team to hunt down leakers*, Gazeteer SF (Mar. 14, 2025), https://sf.gazetteer.co/meta-is-assembling-a-new-team-to-hunt-down-leakers.

[6] *See* Allison Mollenkamp, *Social media CEOs called to Senate Judiciary hearing*, Roll Call (May 15, 2026), https://rollcall.com/2026/05/15/social-media-ceos-called-to-senate-judiciary-hearing/.

Then, on May 20, 2026, Meta abruptly terminated Mr. Sevedge, without his supervisor's knowledge, and on the day that Mr. Sevedge was scheduled to travel for a work research project. Like Mr. DeFriez, Mr. Sevedge was the only employee on his team that Meta targeted for termination at that time—even though each had regularly been recognized as high performers and there was no legitimate business justification for terminating their employment. While Meta apparently believes that the excuse of a reorganization will justify its blatantly unlawful termination of Messrs. Sevedge and DeFriez, this effort will not succeed.

It is clear that Meta targeted them for termination because they were whistleblowers who reported these serious issues to the Senate Judiciary Committee. Given Meta's internal employee monitoring and surveillance, Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge's identities were ascertainable from their whistleblower declarations, which were made public by the Committee. The declarations contained details about their roles and their record of raising internal concerns. For example, *The Washington Post*'s September 2025 coverage of the disclosures featured verbatim quotes from an internal message sent to Mr. DeFriez personally in 2023; and Meta was provided with the original document as part of the journalists' request for comment.[7] We understand that Meta was also able to identify Messrs. DeFriez and Sevedge from titles of documents produced to the Committee, which were made known to Meta.

Additionally, Meta had not only the ability to track employees' access to documents referenced by the Committee in inquiries to Meta, but also a practice of tracing such disclosures to ascertain "leakers." Meta maintains an internal system that stores data on employees' access to company files according to employees' unique identifiers—metadata which would have revealed our clients' recent access to these files. Furthermore, as part of its attempt to intimidate whistleblowers,[8] Company leaders such as CTO Mr. Bosworth frequently touted Meta's implementation of new methods of tracking employee activities in its ongoing effort to identify "leakers." These methods included assigning unique employee-specific watermark identifier codes on documents to allow the Company to immediately identify the employee who accessed the document and to determine when the document was accessed—information which at least one document produced to the Committee by our clients contained. Meta also had the ability to remotely access employee computer cameras to spy on suspected whistleblowers.

Understanding that Chairman Grassley and this Committee are committed to holding Meta and its competitors to account on matters of consumer privacy and child safety, we trust that you will be extremely concerned about Meta's adverse employment action against these two whistleblowers who came to the Committee in good faith, sought Congress's protection, and have now paid the heavy price for their intervention on behalf of young children and their families.

Accordingly, we respectfully ask you to launch further investigations into our clients' allegations of unlawful practices at Meta along with Meta's illegal retaliation against them —

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[7] *See* Swaine and Nix, *supra* at n.1.

[8] *See* Heath, *supra* at n.5.

ahead of and in connection with the Committee's upcoming July 28, 2026, hearing on social media platforms' harm to young users.[9]

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has made it crystal clear that he does not want to testify before this Committee or answer questions about his Company's reckless policies and practices.[10] We are certain you agree that robust Congressional oversight is more important now than ever—not just to ensure public scrutiny of Meta's disregard for child safety online, but also to affirm whistleblower protections in the face of unlawful intimidation and retaliatory terminations.

Sincerely,

Debra S. Katz
Katz Banks Kumin LLP
11 Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20036

Andrew P. Bakaj, Esq
Chief Legal Counsel
Whistleblower Aid
1250 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036

Kyle Gardiner, Esq.
Senior Counsel
Whistleblower Aid
1250 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036

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[9] Owen Dahlkamp and Jordain Carney, *Top tech executives expected to testify at July 28 Senate hearing*, Politico (June 23, 2026), https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2026/06/23/congress/top-tech-executives-expected-to-testify-at-july-28-senate-hearing-00972329.

[10] Owen Dahlpkamp, *White House helped Mark Zuckerberg and the Google CEO dodge a Senate grilling*, Politico (June 24, 2026), https://www.politico.com/news/2026/06/24/white-house-helped-mark-zuckerberg-and-the-google-ceo-dodge-a-senate-grilling-00974497.