

May 19, 2022

Jason Citron
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Discord, Inc.
444 De Haro St., Suite 200
San Francisco, CA 94107

Dear Mr. Citron:

I write to request information regarding Discord’s actions to identify and remove content that broadcasts or promotes domestic terrorism, violent extremism, or hate crimes, as well as any efforts Discord has made to address the use of its platform by those who perpetrate such acts.

This past weekend in Buffalo, New York, a gunman committed a horrific and premediated act of hate-fueled domestic terrorism that killed ten and injured three more. The perpetrator of this act of white supremacist violence against the Black community was apparently motivated by the racist “Great Replacement Theory.” For months leading up to this attack, the perpetrator reportedly used a private, invite-only Discord server to detail his plan to attack the Tops grocery store, complete with hand-drawn maps of the store and photographs of himself with the weapons used to carry out the shooting.¹ Thirty minutes prior to his attack, he invited a small group to the server, but none of those invitees nor Discord itself appear to have alerted law enforcement before the attack.²

This is not the first time Discord has been used to plan, organize, or publicize domestic violent extremist activities. In 2017, white nationalists spent months using Discord to organize the deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia—another event motivated by the “Great Replacement Theory.”³ There, white nationalists chanted “You will not replace us” and “Jews will not replace us,” and one neo-Nazi murdered Heather Heyer and injured more than a dozen others.⁴ In 2018, it was reported that the white-supremacist⁵ group Identity Evropa, which played a central role in organizing the Unite the Right rally and attempts to recruit college

¹ Jonah E. Bromwich, *Before Massacre Began, Suspect Invited Others to Review His Plan*, N.Y. TIMES (May 17, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/17/nyregion/buffalo-shooting-discord-chat-plans.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

² *Id.*

³ Kevin Roose, *This Was the Alt-Right’s Favorite Chat App. Then Came Charlottesville.*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 15, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/technology/discord-chat-app-alt-right.html>.

⁴ Andrew Katz, *UNREST IN VIRGINIA: Clashes Over a Show of White Nationalism in Charlottesville Turn Deadly*, TIME (Aug. 15, 2017), <https://time.com/charlottesville-white-nationalist-rally-clashes/>.

⁵ *Identity Evropa/American Identity Movement*, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE, <https://www.adl.org/resources/profiles/identity-evropaamerican-identity-movement> (last visited May 18, 2022).

students,⁶ maintained a Discord server. Leaked messages from that server show that Identity Evropa used Discord beyond recruiting college students, and also targeted political candidates and other government officials, including active members of the U.S. armed forces.⁷

Law enforcement and other experts have warned that Discord is an attractive platform for extremists given its comparatively lax content monitoring and enforcement practices, particularly as more mainstream apps take steps to de-platform extremist content.⁸ I recognize that Discord started to address the use of its platform to share and amplify violent extremism after the Unite the Right rally,⁹ and reports that it removed 24,444 accounts and 2,182 servers for violent extremism in the second half of 2021.¹⁰ However, given the complexity of this kind of moderation and the continued role of Discord and other social media platforms in facilitating the proliferation of violent extremism, it is crucial that Congress better understand what Discord is doing to address efforts by violent extremists to use its platform recruit, organize, and amplify violence and threats of violence. For this reason, please respond to the following requests as soon as possible, but no later than June 2, 2022:

1. Please produce Discord's terms of service from January 1, 2017 to present, including any changes to its terms of service regarding content that violates Discord's policies on harassment, hate speech or hateful conduct, illegal or dangerous behavior, violence and threats, and violent extremism.¹¹
2. Please explain in detail, and produce documents sufficient to show, how Discord identifies content that violates its terms of service for moderation, including documents describing the timeframe between when such content is posted and when it is removed.

⁶ Anna Schecter, *White nationalist leader is plotting to 'take over the GOP'*, NBCNEWS (Oct. 17, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/white-nationalist-leader-plotting-take-over-gop-n920826>.

⁷ Christopher Mathias, *Exclusive: 7 U.S. Military Members Identified As Part of White Nationalist Group*, HUFFPOST (Mar. 17, 2019), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/white-nationalists-military-identity-evropa_n_5c8ab70ae4b0d7f6b0f1094b.

⁸ Pierre Thomas et al., *Document appears to show Buffalo shooter's planning including March trip to supermarket*, ABC NEWS (May 16, 2022) (quoting NYPD bulletin warning that "Online gaming platforms, in particular Twitch and Discord, have become popular social media alternatives for far-right extremists due to minimal content moderation, as opposed to more mainstream social media platforms"); see also Cecilia D'Anastasio & Davey Alba, *Buffalo Massacre Suspect Mapped Plans on Discord App for Months*, BLOOMBERG (May 16, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-16/buffalo-shooter-laid-out-attack-plans-on-discord-app-for-months>; State of Play: Reviewing the Literature on Gaming & Extremism at 13, EXTREMISM AND GAMING RESEARCH NETWORK (2021), available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WEq4OjtzYdltAB0SK46M88gFF863jWs/view>.

⁹ *How Trust & Safety Addresses Violent Extremism on Discord*, DISCORD: POLICY & SAFETY (May 25, 2021), <https://discord.com/blog/how-trust-safety-addresses-violent-extremism-on-discord>.

¹⁰ *Discord Transparency Report: July-December 2021*, DISCORD: POLICY & SAFETY (Mar. 31, 2021), <https://discord.com/blog/discord-transparency-report-h2-2021>.

¹¹ As defined by Discord's Community Guidelines. See *Discord Community Guidelines*, DISCORD, <https://discord.com/guidelines> (last visited May 18, 2022).

3. Please explain in detail why the Buffalo gunman's posts and subsequent invitation to users to join his server were not detected by Discord's moderation efforts.
4. Please quantify how much content on Discord has been found to violate its policies on harassment, hate speech or hateful conduct, illegal or dangerous behavior, violence and threats, and violent extremism since January 1, 2017.
5. Please explain in detail, and produce documents sufficient to show, how Discord enforces compliance with its terms of service, including when content violates policies on harassment, hate speech or hateful conduct, illegal or dangerous behavior, violence and threats, and violent extremism; the consequences users face for violating terms of service; whether penalties are escalated for repeat offenders; and what steps are taken to prevent users from circumventing penalties, such as banned users simply creating new accounts.
6. Please describe in detail, and produce documents sufficient to show, Discord's guidelines and parameters for recommending content to users, including both the curation of search results and targeted promotions based on user data.
7. Please describe in detail any actions planned, in progress, or completed by Discord to detect and prevent the use of the platform for broadcasting or promoting domestic terrorism and violent extremism.
8. Please describe in detail any actions planned, in progress, or completed by Discord to coordinate with federal, state, local, and tribal governments and agencies to detect, prevent, or investigate violence or threats, including domestic terrorism and violent extremism.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
Chair

cc: The Honorable Charles E. Grassley, Ranking Member