

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

January 23, 2026

The Honorable Kash Patel
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535

Dear Director Patel:

The First Amendment does not permit the government to treat journalists as criminals simply for reporting the news. Yet that is exactly what you, Pam Bondi, and Donald Trump appear to be doing in front of our eyes.

On January 14, 2026, government agents raided a *Washington Post* reporter's home in apparent violation of longstanding protections afforded to journalists, seizing the phone and laptops that she used to communicate with over 1,000 civil servants.¹ In light of this raid, we are writing to demand that you immediately provide Congress a briefing on how and why this search and seizure was justified and documents relating to the investigation.

For over a year, *Washington Post* journalist Hannah Natanson has written extensively about the consequences of the Administration's purge of the federal workforce, gathering over 1,000 sources that include current and former federal employees. Her reporting covered a wide range of actions taken by the Trump Administration that potentially violate federal law and regulations or undermine civil-service protections. Last Wednesday, without informing Ms. Natanson beforehand, the FBI raided her home.²

The justification for this raid was flimsy, filled with contradiction, and seemingly pretextual. Both you and Attorney General Bondi posted that the raid targeted a journalist "who was obtaining and reporting classified and illegally leaked information from a Pentagon contractor" who was now in custody.³ Yet DOJ, apparently contradicting the Attorney General,

¹ *FBI Executes Search Warrant at Washington Post Reporter's Home*, Washington Post (Jan. 14, 2026) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/01/14/washington-post-reporter-search/).

² *Id.*; *I am The Post's 'federal government whisperer.' It's been brutal.*, Washington Post (Dec. 24, 2026) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/12/24/trump-federal-government-workers/).

³ Attorney General Pamela Bondi (@AGPamBondi), X (Jan. 14, 2026) (online at <https://x.com/AGPamBondi/status/2011456849711612019>); FBI Director Kash Patel (@FBI DirectorKash), X (Jan. 14, 2026) (online at <https://x.com/FBIDirectorKash/status/2011475428301554097>).

informed the *Washington Post* that neither Ms. Natanson nor the Post were targets of the investigation, and Ms. Natanson is not referenced in the government's complaint against the Pentagon contractor.⁴

This raid flies in the face of longstanding protections for journalists and current DOJ policy. The Privacy Protection Act, 42 U.S.C. § 2000aa, mandates that journalists' "materials generally cannot be searched or seized unless they are reasonably believed to relate to a crime committed by the person possessing the materials."⁵ Given DOJ has reportedly informed Ms. Natanson that she is not a target of the investigation, there does not appear to be any justification for searching and seizing her own materials. And although Trump's DOJ has, unwisely, revised a policy forbidding searches of reporters' materials, Attorney General Bondi promised that "investigative techniques relating to newsgathering are an extraordinary measure to be deployed as a last resort when essential to a successful investigation or prosecution."⁶ But this raid on Ms. Natanson's home was apparently neither "essential" nor employed as a "last resort": DOJ charged the subject of their investigation without these materials and failed to contact Ms. Natanson to simply request the material in question—a sensible first step.

The broad scope of this unjustified raid appears to reflect the Trump Administration's continuing campaign to punish and dissuade the media and whistleblowers from reporting any damaging facts about the Administration. Before becoming FBI Director, you stated in an interview that Trump should "come after people in the media" and admitted law enforcement would "prosecute them for crimes they said we have always been guilty of but never have."⁷ Since President Trump's inauguration, federal law enforcement has limited visas for journalists, banned mainstream media reporters from the Pentagon for not following official narratives, limited the *Associated Press's* access in the White House, assaulted members of the press during protests, punished law firms that have represented journalists, and threatened network's broadcast licenses for unfavorable coverage. President Trump himself has relentlessly attacked the press, and in an unusual and retributive speech at DOJ, baselessly accused the news media writ large of "illegal behavior."⁸ By all accounts, Ms. Natanson was targeted, like those other media figures and organizations above, because she was exercising her First Amendment right to report on information she obtained.

Freedom of speech and the press is a constitutional bedrock. Using the powers of the FBI and DOJ to target the press is profoundly troubling and represents yet another dramatic step in the erosion of our fundamental freedoms and towards the slide into authoritarianism.

⁴ *FBI Executes Search Warrant at Washington Post Reporter's Home*, Washington Post (Jan. 14, 2026) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/01/14/washington-post-reporter-search/).

⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 2000aa.

⁶ *Attorney General Bondi Rescinds Biden-Era Protections for Journalists in Leak Investigations*, CNN (Apr. 25, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/04/25/politics/justice-department-journalists-leaks/).

⁷ *A New Trump Administration Will 'Come After' the Media, Says Kash Patel*, New York Times (Dec. 5, 2023) (www.nytimes.com/2023/12/05/us/politics/trump-kash-patel-journalists.html).

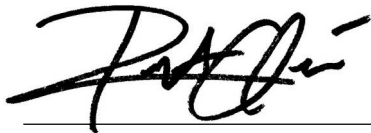
⁸ Reporters Without Borders, *One Year into Trump's Second Term: Increasingly Repressive US President on Track to Join Ranks of World's Worst Press Freedom Predators* (<https://rsf.org/en/one-year-trump-s-second-term-increasingly-repressive-us-president-track-join-ranks-world-s-worst>) (accessed Jan. 21, 2026).

Accordingly, we request a briefing no later than January 30, 2026, that explains why Ms. Natanson's home was raided and her records and possessions seized. In addition, we request all documents, including communications between DOJ, FBI, the Department of Defense, and the White House, regarding Ms. Natanson and her reporting by February 2, 2026.

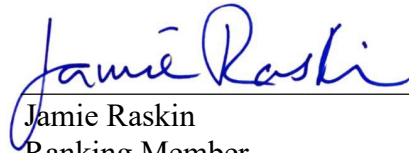
The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. The House Committee on the Judiciary has broad investigative authority over civil liberties, the First Amendment, and federal enforcement of criminal law. The information sought by this letter would also help the Committees determine whether additional measures are necessary to ensure and enhance protections for journalists under the First Amendment.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight
and Government Reform



Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
House Committee on the Judiciary

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Honorable Jim Jordan, Chairman
House Committee on the Judiciary