

ELIZABETH G. OYER
WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

July 1, 2026

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman, Senate Committee on the Judiciary
The Honorable Dick Durbin
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, District of Columbia 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary:

I am writing as a former career official of the Department of Justice to make this Committee aware of my personal experience with Todd Blanche, who has been nominated to serve as the next Attorney General of the United States. Mr. Blanche fired me last year after I refused a demand from his office to use my official position to facilitate a political favor for a friend of the President—specifically, restoring the federal firearm rights of a convicted domestic abuser. After I raised well-documented concerns about public safety (and made clear that the Department could legally proceed despite my objections), Mr. Blanche terminated my employment. Mr. Blanche then subjected me and my family to an extended course of retaliatory conduct, including attempting to prevent me from informing Congress about his actions by directing U.S. Marshals to deliver an intimidating letter to our home and initiating a baseless professional misconduct complaint against me with the bar where I am licensed.

I believe that this Committee should be aware of Mr. Blanche's conduct, which bears upon his fitness to serve as the next Attorney General of the United States.

Mr. Blanche fired me after I refused to rubberstamp a political favor for a friend of the President.

Until March 2025, I was the Justice Department's Pardon Attorney—the senior career official responsible for advising DOJ leadership and the President on executive clemency matters. Mr. Blanche was my direct supervisor. He fired me on March 7, two days after he was confirmed to serve as Deputy Attorney General. My firing was a shock—but also not a total surprise. It happened just hours after I informed Mr. Blanche's office that I would not rubberstamp a political favor for a celebrity friend of the President.

One day after Mr. Blanche's confirmation, his staff instructed me to write a memo recommending that the Department reinstate the gun ownership rights of the actor Mel Gibson. Mr. Gibson had lost his federal firearm rights after he was convicted of a crime of domestic violence; his then-girlfriend reported that Mr. Gibson hit her while she was holding their infant

daughter, punched her in the mouth breaking her teeth, threatened her with a gun, and verbally berated her. Shortly after President Trump's inauguration, Mr. Gibson's attorney sent a letter to DOJ requesting that the Department reinstate his federal firearm rights. The letter cited Mr. Gibson's personal relationship with Mr. Trump and his catalogue of famous films.

Mr. Gibson's request raised serious concerns about public safety. Data reported by DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women shows that over half of the women murdered in the United States are killed by a current or former intimate partner, and "the presence of firearms significantly escalates the danger in relationships where there is domestic violence by increasing the risk of homicide by 500%."¹

Under longstanding DOJ policy, the Office of the Pardon Attorney does not recommend restoration of rights without careful vetting. Pardon candidates are required to provide detailed information about risk factors such as mental health and substance abuse history; to supply supporting documentation and character references; and to undergo a rigorous background investigation, conducted by the FBI, to ensure that restoring their rights would not endanger public safety. Rearming a domestic abuser without careful vetting was not consistent with the Department's policies or its duty to protect public safety.

My office had not vetted Mr. Gibson's application, nor were we given an opportunity to do so. For that reason, I informed Mr. Blanche's staff that I could not make the recommendation they demanded. I had already sent forward a list of dozens of recommended candidates for restoration of gun rights who my office had fully vetted; Mr. Gibson's name was not on the list.

My recommendation was not actually needed to grant Mr. Gibson's request. The legal authority to restore firearm rights rests with the Attorney General. As a career official, I understood that my recommendation would lend a veneer of legitimacy to what could otherwise look like a political favor. But I made sure Mr. Blanche's office knew that the Department could restore Mr. Gibson's rights without my approval.

Nevertheless, on March 6, 2025 (one day before I was fired), Mr. Blanche's senior staff instructed me to prepare a memo recommending that the Department reinstate Mr. Gibson's gun rights. I informed them by email the same day that I could not make that recommendation because of my concerns about public safety. One of Mr. Blanche's deputies called me that evening and asked me to reconsider, citing Mr. Gibson's personal relationship with the President.

¹ Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, Announcements: Resource Guide for Addressing the Intersection of Domestic Violence and Firearms, at <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/announcements>; *see also id.*, Resource Guide, at <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/resource-guide-addressing-intersection-domestic-violence-and-firearms>.

I knew from the tone of the conversation that this request was highly consequential. I didn't sleep at all that night. In the morning, I sent Mr. Blanche's deputy an email reflecting that I had not changed my mind. A few hours later, I was notified that Mr. Blanche had fired me.

That took place on a Friday afternoon. A panicked colleague pulled me out of a meeting to inform me that security officers were waiting to escort me out of the building. I rushed back to my office, where I was handed a three-sentence memo signed by Mr. Blanche. It informed me I was terminated effective immediately. I got no notice and no explanation. The officers allowed me to pack my personal belongings into a grocery bag, and they walked me out of the building in front of my stunned and traumatized staff.

I am still in litigation with the Department seeking recourse for my illegal firing, which plainly violates federal civil service and whistleblower protection laws. I appealed my firing to the Merit Systems Protection Board well over a year ago, but DOJ has repeatedly delayed and obstructed any resolution of the matter.

Mr. Blanche retaliated against me and my family multiple times after I was fired.

After I was fired, I spoke about it publicly. I felt it was my duty to voice my concerns about the reckless and dangerous use of official powers of the Justice Department. In response, Mr. Blanche gave a statement to the press attacking me for speaking out and claiming that my "version of events is false."² But he has never actually disputed any of the facts I described. Mr. Blanche's office is in possession of documents that corroborate everything I have said, but he has declined to produce copies of them pursuant to a FOIA request, which I am now litigating.

Mr. Blanche's false and disparaging statements about me were only the beginning of his retaliatory actions. A few weeks later, I was scheduled to testify before Members of Congress in a bicameral spotlight hearing, at the invitation of Rep. Jamie Raskin and Sen. Adam Schiff. The hearing was scheduled to take place on a Monday (April 7). The Friday night before the hearing (April 4), Mr. Blanche directed the Department's Security and Emergency Planning Staff to send armed Special Deputy U.S. Marshals to my home to intimidate me. I learned that the officers were en route to my house shortly after nine p.m., when a very decent career employee of the Department called to warn me. At the time, my teenager was home alone while my husband and I were out with my elderly parents. Knowing how traumatic it would be for my child if these

² See, e.g., Perry Stein, The Washington Post, *Fired Justice Dept. Official Speaks About Her Ouster and Mel Gibson* (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/12/pardon-attorney-elizabeth-oyer-fired-speaks-out/>.

armed men showed up at the door, the caller was able to get the officers to stand down, for which I am profoundly grateful.

I went forward with my testimony despite Mr. Blanche's attempts to intimidate me. Copies of my written and oral remarks accompany this letter.³ I am also providing a copy of a complaint submitted on my behalf to DOJ's Office of the Inspector General (OIG).⁴

Shortly after my testimony, I learned that Mr. Blanche had initiated a misconduct complaint against me with the Office of Disciplinary Counsel for the D.C. Bar, where I am licensed. I had to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket to hire a lawyer, at a time when I was unemployed. After a months-long investigation, the complaint was finally dismissed in February of this year. Though the complaint lacked merit, the process took a toll on me and my family (which presumably was the objective).

Mr. Blanche has obstructed my efforts to seek legal recourse against the Department.

On a human level, dealing with the Department has been a nightmare since my firing. As noted earlier, DOJ has aggressively delayed and side-tracked my straightforward MSPB challenge to my unlawful firing, effectively denying me my day in court thus far. Additionally, shortly after I was fired, I requested some basic personnel documents from DOJ, including my annual performance evaluations, which show that I received the highest possible rating ("outstanding") each year. DOJ responded that these were "complex" requests, and I should not expect a response anytime soon.

For weeks, DOJ also refused to provide me with documents about my benefits, including my health insurance and my retirement funds. Finally, after my requests received some media attention, I got an email advising me that my health insurance would expire in five days. To extend my coverage, the cost would more than quadruple. And to keep my family covered, I would have to provide proof of our familial relationships, including my marriage certificate, my child's birth certificate, and proof of a common residence or joint tax filings.

I have also sought documents related to my firing pursuant to a FOIA request, which is now in litigation. Remarkably, the Department has claimed that Mr. Blanche's office has no documents—none—related to my firing, despite the fact that Mr. Blanche himself dismissed me.

³ See Exhibit 1.

⁴ See Exhibit 2. OIG opened a preliminary investigation into the matter, but it is my understanding that the investigation was abandoned after the departure of the agency's Inspector General, Michael Horowitz.

DOJ FOIA staff claim that they searched Mr. Blanche's files and found nothing—not a single page. They didn't even find the memo he signed firing me in his files.

This raises serious questions about what channels of communications Mr. Blanche is using to conduct official DOJ business; where (or whether) he is preserving records required by federal law; and whether he is telling the truth about documents in his possession, custody or control. I respectfully suggest that this Committee should probe whether Mr. Blanche has complied with the Federal Records Act or is using forms of communication that evade oversight.⁵

My treatment by Mr. Blanche is not an isolated case. Although many others have chosen not to speak out, numerous dedicated and high-performing senior career attorneys have been fired or driven out, without cause or explanation, from Mr. Blanche's DOJ. The unmistakable message is that employees must keep their concerns to themselves about actions they view as unsafe or unlawful—or face losing their jobs.

The harmful impact of purging career officials is not limited to the dedicated civil servants who lose their livelihoods. My firing, for example, was traumatic to my entire team of hard-working career professionals. They watched in shock and horror as I was marched out of the building with no warning, no explanation, and no chance to say goodbye.

Since my firing, the pardon process has become a dangerous and chaotic free-for-all.

Removing career experts like me harms the Department's ability to fulfill its vital mission of upholding the rule of law, and it makes America less safe. What has happened to the pardon process since my firing is just one example.

Though the President has absolute discretion with respect to pardons under the Constitution, for over 130 years the Justice Department has been charged with ensuring that the pardon power is not used recklessly, corruptly, or in other ways that are detrimental to the integrity of the justice system. Under federal regulations, the Pardon Attorney is charged with rigorously vetting applications for executive clemency and making recommendations in accordance with a detailed

⁵ Notably, recent public reports indicate that Mr. Blanche's then-boss, former Attorney General Bondi, "rarely" used her official DOJ email account. See Maggie Haberman & Jonathan Swan, *Inside the White House Freakout Over the Epstein Files*, The New York Times Magazine (June 10, 2026), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/10/magazine/trump-epstein-files-white-house-vance-doj.html>. Additional reporting reflects that many senior officials in the current Administration use the messaging application Signal to conduct official business. See Michael Scherer *et al.*, *Hegseth, Rubio, and Caine Had an Auto-Deleting Signal Chat*, The Atlantic (June 29, 2026), at <https://www.theatlantic.com/national-security/2026/06/trump-administration-signal-chat-marco-rubio/687735/>.

set of guidelines codified in the Justice Manual. By regulation, the Pardon Attorney's recommendations are submitted "through the Deputy Attorney General," who then exercises "such discretion and authority as is appropriate and necessary for the handling and transmittal of such recommendations to the President." 28 C.F.R. § 0.36.

To guard against politicization of the pardon power, the position of Pardon Attorney has traditionally been reserved for a career expert. However, the job is now filled by Ed Martin, a political operative who failed to win confirmation as U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia.

Neither Mr. Blanche nor Mr. Martin has imposed any discipline on executive clemency. The lack of vetting has resulted in staggering rates of recidivism among recent clemency recipients—including at least 14 charged with sex crimes or offenses involving child sexual abuse material, and at least six with domestic violence crimes.⁶ Crime victims have been deprived of over a billion dollars in restitution owed as a result of pardons.⁷ A pay-to-play pardon system has developed that has advantaged the wealthy and well-connected.⁸

Hardly anyone who has received clemency during this Administration meets the merit-based criteria historically enforced by the Justice Department. Most have not even applied through the Justice Department.⁹ Meanwhile, there is now a backlog of over 20,000 applications for clemency pending with the Office of the Pardon Attorney—an increase of more than 300 percent since my firing last year. Without question, some of those whose applications are languishing there for lack of political connections would merit the exercise of executive clemency.

* * * *

I welcome the opportunity to meet with the Members of this Committee in person or virtually. I am also willing to testify under oath. I am available to provide any additional information that

⁶ See, e.g., Katherine Pompilio, *The Jan. 6 Pardons: How Many Clemency Recipients Have Faced Other Charges*, Lawfare (June 4, 2026).

⁷ See, e.g., Dan Greenberg, Cato Institute, *President Trump's Pardons: An Embarrassment of Riches* (Feb. 11, 2026), at <https://www.cato.org/blog/embarrassment-riches>.

⁸ See, e.g., Rebecca Ballhaus et al., *Inside the New Fast Track to a Presidential Pardon: Lobbyists Close to Trump Say Their Going Rate to Advocate for a Pardon Is \$1 Million*, The Wall Street Journal (Dec. 23, 2025), at <https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/trump-presidential-pardon-process-dda97c15>.

⁹ See, e.g., Marisa Taylor et al., *How to Get a Trump Pardon: Forget the DOJ, Call "Bobby" and Other Influencers*, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/forget-doj-trump-pardon-call-bobby-other-influencers-2026-06-11>.

Hon. Charles E. Grassley

Hon. Dick Durbin

July 1, 2026

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would be helpful to you. I am sharing my personal contact information under separate cover.
Thank you for your careful consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth G. Oyer

EXHIBIT 1

Written and Oral Remarks of Elizabeth G. Oyer

Before Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees

Hearing on Restoring Accountability and Attacks on the Rule of Law

April 7, 2025

Oyer Opening Remarks

Exactly one month ago, I was terminated from my job as the Department of Justice's Pardon Attorney. The Pardon Attorney is a nonpolitical position entrusted with advising the President on the exercise of his constitutional clemency power.

When I was fired, there were over 6,000 applications pending from ordinary Americans pleading with the President to grant them second chances through clemency.

I had planned to talk today about the events leading up to my firing. But some more recent developments have persuaded me to focus my time on the callous cruelty with which DOJ leadership is treating dedicated public servants like myself.

For me, this began with my abrupt firing. It was 2:00 on a Friday afternoon. I was in a conference room meeting with colleagues from several DOJ offices. We were brainstorming about how to accomplish a particular priority of the Attorney General.

Halfway through the meeting, I was frantically pulled out by my deputy. In the hallway, she broke the news that security officers were waiting in my office, under instructions to serve me with termination papers and escort me out of the building.

I rushed back to my office. There, I was handed a three-sentence memo, signed by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, firing me effective immediately. I had never met Mr. Blanche, and I was given no explanation for his decision.

That afternoon, I walked out of the building for the last time, carrying a grocery bag filled with my personal effects. I had no time to say goodbye to my team. I was in shock. Everyone I passed on my way out was watching in shock and horror.

I want Deputy Attorney General Blanche and Attorney General Bondi to know: It is traumatic for everyone in the entire organization to see a beloved colleague and leader treated like this.

My heart aches for my colleagues who had to go back into that office on Monday, with no explanation from DOJ leadership, and no assurances about what the future holds for them.

They are good, dedicated people, and they deserve better.

After I was fired, I chose to speak publicly about the events leading up to my termination. I felt it was my obligation to share my concerns about the reckless and unethical use of Department resources to accomplish political objectives, including favors for loyalists and friends.

Shortly after I did so, Mr. Blanche contacted the media to accuse me of lying. This still puzzles me, because his staff have all the emails and memos documenting everything I have ever said. I requested those documents through FOIA, but Mr. Blanche's office still has not produced them.

I have made some other, simple requests of the Department since my firing. One was for my annual performance evaluations, which show that I received "outstanding" ratings each year. One was for personnel documents I would need to file for unemployment.

DOJ responded that these were "complex" requests, and I should not expect a response anytime soon.

For weeks after my firing, DOJ also refused to provide me with documents about my benefits, including my health insurance and my retirement funds.

Finally, on April 2, after my requests received some media attention, I got an email advising me that my health insurance would expire in five days.

To extend my coverage, the cost would more than quadruple. And to keep my family members covered, I would have to provide proof of our familial relationships, including my marriage certificate, my child's birth certificate, and proof of a common residence or joint tax filings.

Perhaps the most personally upsetting part of the story is the lengths to which the leaders of the Department have gone to deter me from testifying here today.

On Friday night, around 9:15pm, I learned that the Deputy Attorney General's Office had directed the Department's Security and Emergency Planning Staff to

have two armed Special Deputy U.S. Marshals personally serve me with a letter at my home late that night.

I was in the car with my husband and my parents when I got the news that the officers were on their way to my house, where my teenage child was home alone.

Fortunately, due to the grace of a very decent person who understood how upsetting this would be to my family, I was able to confirm receipt of the letter to an email address, and the deputies were called off.

The letter had been emailed just before 8pm. At no point did Mr. Blanche's staff pick up the phone and call me before sending armed officers to my home.

The letter was a warning to me about the risks of testifying here today.

But I am here, because I will not be bullied into concealing the ongoing corruption and abuse of the powers of the Department of Justice.

DOJ is entrusted with keeping us safe, upholding our civil rights, and protecting the rule of law. It is not a personal favor bank for the President. Its career employees are not the President's personal debt collectors.

I see only Democratic Members here today, but this is not a partisan issue.

It should alarm all Americans that the leadership of the Department of Justice appears to value political loyalty over and above the fair and responsible administration of justice.

It should offend all Americans that our leaders are treating public servants with a lack of basic decency and humanity.

Thank you.

Statement of Elizabeth G. Oyer

Former Department of Justice Pardon Attorney

Before Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees

Hearing on Restoring Accountability and Attacks on the Rule of Law

April 7, 2025

On March 7, 2025, I was terminated from a position at the Department of Justice that I had poured my heart and soul into for nearly three years. I was the Department's Pardon Attorney, a nonpolitical appointee in the career Senior Executive Service. At the time I was fired, I had over 13 years of dedicated federal service, plus seven years in private practice.

My job as Pardon Attorney was to advise the President on the use of his constitutional clemency power. I supervised a team of approximately 40 people who assisted with this function. All of us were career, nonpolitical appointees. All of us were dedicated to the mission of providing second chances through clemency to deserving Americans, without consideration of means, status, or politics.

Each year, the Department of Justice receives thousands of applications for executive clemency from citizens across the country. Most are ordinary Americans who do not have political connections, or access to the White House, or spare cash to pay attorneys and lobbyists. Many applications come handwritten from people in prison who are seeking early release from lengthy sentences—often mandatory minimums imposed under outdated sentencing laws. Some applications come carefully typed from people in the community seeking relief from burdensome collateral consequences of a dated criminal conviction after many years of exemplary conduct. The applications often include letters of support from loved ones who have seen their entire family life upended by the criminal justice system. Their hopes are resting on the slim promise of clemency.

When I was fired, there were over 6,000 clemency applications pending—mostly from ordinary Americans pleading with the President to exercise mercy and grant them second chances through clemency. My job as Pardon Attorney was to carefully vet these applicants, identify those truly worthy candidates, and get those cases onto the President's desk.

I fully expected to be able to continue this work under the current Administration. My team was standing by—ready, willing, and able to assist with this function—on Day 1.

Unfortunately, the new Administration showed little interest in considering our clemency recommendations. Instead, Department leadership redirected the resources of the Office of the Pardon Attorney toward an initiative to restore gun rights to Americans who lost the right to own a firearm due to criminal conduct. This is not a role the Office had ever played before, to my knowledge. Nevertheless, I jumped in on this project as soon as it was assigned to me. I joined a working group with other Department personnel, led by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General. I devoted substantial amounts of time to working with my team in good faith to accomplish the objectives of Department leadership.

Despite my best efforts to faithfully perform the work assigned to me, I was fired on March 7. I was not given any explanation for why I was fired. But the notice was delivered hours after I informed Department leadership that I could not acquiesce to a request they had made of me. Specifically, I had been asked to recommend restoring the firearm rights of a famous friend of the President who had lost his right to own a gun due to a domestic violence conviction. I declined to do so based on concerns about public safety.

It was about 2:00 on a Friday afternoon when I learned I was being fired. I was in a conference room meeting with colleagues from several other DOJ offices, as part of another Department working group. We were brainstorming about how to accomplish a particular priority of the Attorney General.

Halfway through the meeting, I was pulled out by my deputy. She frantically broke the news that uniformed security officers were waiting in my office, under instructions to serve me with termination papers and escort me out of the building.

I rushed back to my office, where I was given a three-sentence memo signed by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, firing me effective immediately. I had never met Mr. Blanche, and I received no explanation for my firing.

A short time later, I walked out of the building for the last time carrying a grocery bag filled with my personal effects. I left behind this wonderful, dedicated team that I had built. I had no time to say goodbye to them. I was in shock. Everyone I passed on the way out was in shock. It was a lot for my whole team to process, and I think we are still processing it. There have been so many emotions: sadness and disappointment, but also fear, confusion, and anger.

I want Todd Blanche and Pam Bondi to know: It is traumatic for everyone in the entire organization to see a beloved colleague and leader treated like this. My heart aches for my colleagues who had to go back into that office on Monday, with no explanation from DOJ leadership, and with no assurances about what the future holds for them. They are good, dedicated people, and they deserve better.

After I was fired, I chose to speak publicly about the events leading up to my termination. I felt that it was my obligation to share my concerns about the reckless, dangerous, and unethical use of Department resources to accomplish political objectives, including favors for loyalists and friends.

Shortly after, Deputy Attorney General Blanche contacted CNN and MSNBC to accuse me of lying. This still puzzles me, because Mr. Blanche and his staff have all the emails and memos documenting everything I have said. I have requested those documents from the Department under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), but as of today, Mr. Blanche's office has not produced them.

I have made some other, simple requests of DOJ since my termination. One was for my annual performance evaluations, which show that I received "outstanding" ratings each year. One was for my personnel file (eOPF), documenting my termination, which I would need to file for unemployment benefits. DOJ responded to me that these were "Complex" requests, and therefore I should not expect a response within any defined timeframe.

For weeks after my firing, DOJ also refused to provide me with documents to which I am legally entitled about the benefits I accrued during my federal service. This includes information I needed to ensure the continuity of health insurance coverage for my family. It includes information about my earned leave and retirement funds.

Finally, after the issue received some media attention, DOJ started responding to some of my requests.

On April 2—26 days after my termination—DOJ’s benefits provider, GRB (Government Retirement & Benefits, Inc.), sent me some basic information about my health insurance coverage. GRB sought to excuse its delay by stating that it had been “backlogged with separation packages in the past few weeks.”

The packet I received advised me that my insurance would expire in five days. It told me that to extend my coverage, the cost would more than quadruple. It advised me that to keep my family members covered, I would have to provide documentary proof of our familial relationships, including my marriage certificate, my child’s birth certificate, and proof of a common residence or joint tax filings. None of this documentation was required when I enrolled my family in the benefits programs as an employee. And of course, they left me just days to do all of that.

Sadly, I am just one of thousands of dedicated civil servants being treated with a lack of basic human decency. I see this as a dim reflection of the motives and priorities of those currently running our federal government.

I also want to talk about the lengths to which the Department of Justice has gone to prevent me from testifying here today.

On Friday night, at about 9:15 p.m., I learned that the Deputy Attorney General’s Office had directed the Department’s Security and Emergency Planning Staff to have two armed Special Deputy U.S. Marshals personally serve me with a letter at my home that night. The Deputy Marshals were directed to serve the letter between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m., when my teenage child was the only person at home. The letter was a warning to me about the risks of testifying here today.

Fortunately, while the armed officers were in route to my residence, I was able to confirm receipt of the letter—which had been sent to a secondary personal email address at 7:58 p.m.—and forestall the arrival of the officers at my home. Had Mr. Blanche’s office simply contacted me by telephone, or via the email address that I had repeatedly used to communicate with the Department in the preceding days, this whole, frightening incident could have been avoided.

My experience is just one example of a much broader pattern of attacks on career experts across the Department of Justice. These pervasive assaults by the political leadership of the Department are terrorizing the career workforce. This is not by accident or oversight—it is by design. The very purpose of systematically forcing out career employees is to invoke fear, so that fear will give way to blind loyalty.

The Attorney General has declared openly that she intends to “root out” those who persist in independent thinking or who place principles over politics. On day one in office, Attorney General Bondi told the entire, 115,000-person workforce that we are all the President’s lawyers. A few weeks later, she stood at the podium in the Great Hall and announced that she works “at

the directive of Donald Trump,” who has declared himself the country’s Chief Law Enforcement Officer.

This is wrong. Ms. Bondi and Mr. Blanche, like all DOJ lawyers, work for the American people. The Department of Justice is entrusted with keeping us safe, upholding our civil rights, and protecting the rule of law. DOJ is not a personal favor bank for the President. Its career employees are not the President’s personal debt collectors. It is dangerous and wrong to prioritize political loyalty over the laws of this nation, the safety of its citizens, and the fair and responsible administration of justice.

EXHIBIT 2

**Complaint submitted on behalf of Elizabeth G. Oyer
to the Office of Inspector General, Department of Justice**



April 21, 2025

**Honorable Michael E. Horowitz
Inspector General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC. 20530**

Re: Misconduct in the Firing and Attempted Intimidation of Liz Oyer

Dear Mr. Horowitz:

The arbitrary firing and attempted intimidation of former Department of Justice (DOJ) Pardon Attorney Elizabeth Oyer is a dark chapter in the recent history of DOJ. Her baseless and improper dismissal, and the subsequent attempts to intimidate her from sharing her story with elected Senators and House members, require a thorough investigation and a public accounting. Although the outlines of Ms. Oyer's recent experience are now a matter of public record, many of the details are not. This letter provides some of those details and constitutes ample grounds to initiate an OIG investigation. We are prepared to make Ms. Oyer available for an in-person interview to provide additional information and respond to any questions.

Ms. Oyer served as Pardon Attorney from April 11, 2022, until her sudden and unjustified firing on March 7, 2025. As you know, the Pardon Attorney is a career-reserved position in the Senior Executive Service and reports directly to the Deputy Attorney General. The Pardon Attorney oversees the Office of the Pardon Attorney (PARDON), supervises a staff of approximately 40 professionals and administrative staff, and is responsible for reviewing and evaluating applications for executive clemency.

In early February 2025, Ms. Oyer was advised that Department leadership intended to assign a substantial new workstream to PARDON that fell well outside the scope of the Office's traditional duties pertaining to executive clemency. As described to Ms. Oyer,

Department leadership planned to make use of existing but long dormant authority of the Attorney General under 18 U.S.C. § 925(c) to restore firearm rights to individuals prohibited from possessing a firearm under federal law (18 U.S.C. § 922(g)). Ms. Oyer was informed that leadership was assigning PARDON with developing and implementing an application and adjudication process for persons previously disqualified by law from shipping, transporting, possessing, or receiving any firearm or ammunition.

The Attorney General's statutory authority to restore gun rights under § 925(c) had been previously delegated to ATF, and a regulatory framework was in place that authorized ATF to receive and investigate applications for restoration of gun rights. However, this process had been defunct since the early 1990s, when Congress imposed a budget rider, renewed ever since in annual appropriations bills, prohibiting ATF from using any appropriated funds for this purpose.¹ In short, the restoration of firearms rights had been essentially a dead letter for approximately 35 years.

Ms. Oyer was assigned to a working group consisting of representatives from multiple DOJ components, which met regularly and was led by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG), and specifically by Associate Deputy Attorney General Paul Perkins (with the assistance of Associate Deputy Attorney General James McHenry). After being assigned to the working group, Ms. Oyer raised significant concerns about certain aspects of the § 925(c) project. One of these concerns was that PARDON's small budget and staff were inadequate to effectively and timely accomplish a project of this scale; based on data compiled by the Criminal Division, PARDON estimated that at least 25 million Americans would be eligible to apply for the proposed relief. Ms. Oyer was advised by ADAG Perkins, and subsequently by Acting DAG Emil Bove, that it was premature to address these issues.

Ms. Oyer also raised concerns about the scope of the eligible population—specifically, whether individuals with a history of domestic violence should be eligible for relief, focusing on the public safety implications and potential victim harm from rearming domestic abusers. She proposed excluding these individuals from relief, or at a minimum consulting with the Department's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to better understand the risks and to develop appropriate eligibility criteria. Ms. Oyer was advised by Mr. Perkins that domestic violence offenders could not be excluded because it was necessary to grant relief to Mel Gibson.

In late February, in connection with the planned public announcement of the restoration of firearms rights, Ms. Oyer was asked to identify an initial group of individuals whose gun rights the Attorney General could restore immediately. Ms. Oyer agreed to assist by looking for individuals who had applied for presidential pardons who might be

¹ DOJ leadership apparently believed they could circumvent the budget rider by assigning the function to a DOJ entity other than ATF.

appropriate candidates. Specifically, Ms. Oyer worked with her team to identify individuals who (1) had been fully vetted through the ordinary pardon application process, and (2) who indicated that they were seeking a pardon at least in part to regain their firearm rights.

To Ms. Oyer, starting with pardon applicants made sense because one of the consequences of receiving a presidential pardon is that the recipient can lawfully purchase a firearm. As a result, many pardon applicants specify their desire to regain their firearms rights as one reason why they are seeking a pardon. As a result, the pardon vetting process is quite rigorous, including a full background investigation by the FBI, to ensure that the candidate does not pose an ongoing risk to public safety.

Ms. Oyer and her team identified 95 individuals who met those criteria and provided detailed summaries of their backgrounds to ODAG. ODAG pared down the list to nine people and then asked Ms. Oyer to write a memo to the Attorney General recommending that she restore their firearm rights. Ms. Oyer agreed to do so because these individuals were fully vetted and had several other key things in common: they were convicted of nonviolent crimes; their convictions were decades old; and they had lengthy records of exemplary conduct in the years since.

On March 6, Ms. Oyer completed the requested memo and emailed it to Mr. Perkins. The same day, Ms. Oyer received a response from ADAG Perkins directing her to “add Mel” to her recommendation. Mr. Perkins attached a letter from an attorney representing Mr. Gibson, which explained that Mr. Gibson attempted to purchase a gun in 2023 but was denied due to a domestic violence conviction. The letter, which to the best of Ms. Oyer’s recollection was dated January 29, 2025, requested the Attorney General to restore Mr. Gibson’s gun rights, citing his relationship with the President and the fact that he had made many well-known movies.

Ms. Oyer understood that this was a consequential and troubling request, given that it was coming from Department leadership and in light of the personal relationship between Mr. Gibson and the President. Nevertheless, due to serious concerns about public safety, Ms. Oyer declined to add Mr. Gibson to the list of persons in her memo who she was willing to endorse as qualified for the restoration of their gun rights.

Later on March 6, Ms. Oyer informed Mr. Perkins by email that based on the available information, she was unable to recommend Mr. Gibson for relief. Ms. Oyer acknowledged that the Attorney General was the final decisionmaker and could grant relief to whomever she deemed appropriate, but stated in the email that her own recommendation was to deny relief.

A few hours later, Mr. Perkins called Ms. Oyer and asked if her position was “flexible.” Ms. Oyer said that it was not, based on the information available to her. Mr. Perkins then proceeded to explain to Ms. Oyer, in substance, that Mr. Gibson had a personal relationship with the President, and that should be sufficient basis for her to make the recommendation. Further, Mr. Perkins conveyed to her that she would be wise to make the

recommendation. Ms. Oyer told Perkins she would think about whether there was a way to thread the needle. Based on Mr. Perkins' comments and tone, Ms. Oyer understood that her refusal to fulfill the request concerning Mr. Gibson would be problematic. In short, Perkins was asking her to make a recommendation to the Attorney General that gave preferential treatment to a friend of President Trump who otherwise did not satisfy the criteria she and her colleagues had been using.

On the morning of March 7, Ms. Oyer converted her draft recommendation memo to one that did not include recommendations. She did summarize the information provided by Mr. Gibson's attorney, while making clear that she was not offering a recommendation as to him or any of the other candidates for firearms restoration. She sent the memo to Mr. Perkins.

At approximately 2:00 p.m. on March 7, Ms. Oyer was in a meeting with approximately a dozen or more representatives of different DOJ offices concerning a different project. Ms. Oyer's deputy pulled her out of the meeting to inform her that security officers were looking for Ms. Oyer to serve her with termination papers.

Ms. Oyer returned to her office immediately, where two security officers handed her a memo from Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche advising her that she was terminated effective immediately. The officers stated that they had been instructed to direct Ms. Oyer to pack up her personal belongings and to escort her out of the building. Ms. Oyer complied. She received no explanation for Mr. Blanche's decision to terminate her.

Ms. Oyer subsequently spoke to The New York Times about her firing, which published a story on March 10 (Justice Dept. Official Says She Was Fired After Opposing Restoring Mel Gibson's Gun Rights, [NY Times, March 10, 2025](#)). On March 11, Deputy Attorney General Blanche made the following public statement to several media outlets in response to the reporting on Ms. Oyer's firing:

"Former employees who violate their ethical duties by making false accusations on press tours will not be tolerated. This former employee's version of events is false — her decision to voice this erroneous accusation about her dismissal is in direct violation of her ethical duties as an attorney and is a shameful distraction from our critical mission to prosecute violent crime, enforce our nation's immigration laws, and make America safe again." See, e.g., Washington Post, Fired Justice Dept. Official Speaks About Her Ouster and Mel Gibson (Mar. 12, 2025), [Washington Post, March 12, 2025](#).

On March 14, after Mr. Blanche accused her of lying, Ms. Oyer made a FOIA request for the documents corroborating her account of the events leading up to her firing, including her communications with Mr. Blanche's staff. On March 19, Ms. Oyer received a partial response from the Office of the Pardon Attorney; however, none of Ms. Oyer's communications with ODAG have been produced.

Following Ms. Oyer's termination on March 7, the Department failed to promptly provide her with any information about the effect of her firing on her benefits such as health insurance and retirement savings. The Department also did not timely provide Ms. Oyer with an SF-50 documenting her termination. Ms. Oyer repeatedly contacted DOJ's benefits provider, GRB, seeking this information. She was repeatedly told that it would be provided soon. However, none of the requested information was provided until April 2 (26 days after Ms. Oyer's firing).

Ms. Oyer also sought to obtain a copy of her complete personnel file (eOPF) and her annual performance evaluations, which showed that she received "outstanding" ratings each year. Those documents were not provided until April 3 (27 days after her firing).

Following her termination, Ms. Oyer was invited by United States Senators and Members of Congress to testify about the circumstances of her firing in a "spotlight hearing" on Monday, April 7. On Friday, April 4, shortly after 9:00 p.m., Ms. Oyer learned that the Office of the Deputy Attorney General had directed DOJ's Security and Emergency Planning Staff (SEPS) to send two, armed Special Deputy U.S. Marshals to Ms. Oyer's home that night to personally serve her with a letter pertaining to her upcoming testimony. The letter from ADAG Kendra Wharton, warned Ms. Oyer that her anticipated testimony in Congress would likely violate executive privilege, among other things. The claim was bogus for any number of reasons and was purely an effort to intimidate her from telling her story publicly to members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives.

Fortunately, Ms. Oyer was provided a heads up by a member of DOJ's Security and Emergency Planning Staff (SEPS) that the armed Marshals were en route to her residence. Ms. Oyer advised the SEPS employee that she was not at home and that her teenage child was home alone. She asked whether there was any way to avoid the officers arriving at her home while her child was home alone. The SEPS employee agreed that if Ms. Oyer could confirm receipt of the letter to her email, he would turn the deputies around. Ms. Oyer was able to do so and the deputies were recalled before they reached her residence.

This type of misconduct, abuse of power and authority, and mistreatment of career DOJ personnel has no place in the Department of Justice. It undermines the norms and traditions of a non-partisan, apolitical career workforce whose members must not be dismissed at the whim of high-level officials. In this case, Ms. Oyer was unwilling to violate the dictates of her conscience by following inappropriate orders.

Particularly in a time that lacks even the pretense of Congressional oversight, it is all the more important for the OIG to investigate allegations of misconduct and call out any misconduct it finds with force and clarity. We request that you investigate the conduct of Mr. Blanche, Mr. Bove, Mr. Perkins, Kendra Wharton, and anyone else you determine was involved in the decisions to apply inappropriate pressure to Ms. Oyer and then dismiss her

Letter to Michael E. Horowitz

April 21, 2025

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when their demands violated her personal and professional ethics.

Ms. Oyer is available for an in-person interview at the time and place you designate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael R. Bromwich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Bromwich" clearly legible, and "R." as a middle initial.

Michael R. Bromwich