

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 24, 2023

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

Dear Mr. Musk:

Twitter has a responsibility to ensure that its platform is open and accessible to disabled users. Yet, you recently eliminated Twitter's Accessibility Team, which played a crucial role in developing and implementing essential features for Twitter users with disabilities. Not surprisingly, since you shut down Twitter's Accessibility Team, disabled users have reported increased difficulty and frustration using Twitter. I urge you to immediately reinstate Twitter's Accessibility Team and take all necessary steps to promote accessibility for disabled Twitter users.

Twitter's historical record on disability access was far from perfect,¹ but in recent years, the Accessibility Team markedly improved it.² Twitter's Accessibility Team was responsible for features that allowed disabled Twitter users to develop a community, advocate on key issues, organize, share information, and engage in commercial activity on Twitter.³ These improvements included adding reminders for users to include alt-text for images to describe content for people who are blind or low vision;⁴ creating auto-generated captions on videos for people who are deaf or hard of hearing;⁵ and changing app sounds to make them more pleasing for people with sensory issues.⁶ Today, these features are essential for disabled Twitter users.

Your decision to eliminate Twitter's Accessibility Team therefore represents a dramatic and unwelcome shift, one that has already had devastating consequences for Twitter users with

¹ Sarah Katz, *Twitter Just Rolled Out a Feature That's Inaccessible to Disabled Users*, Slate (Jun. 19, 2020), <https://slate.com/technology/2020/06/twitter-voice-tweets-accessibility.html>.

² Kate Knibbs, *Twitter's Layoffs Are a Blow to Accessibility*, Wired (Nov. 21, 2022), <https://www.wired.com/story/twitter-layoffs-accessibility/>.

³ Megan McCluskey, *Twitter Was a Lifeline for People With Disabilities. Musk's Reign Is Changing All of That*, TIME (Nov. 11, 2022), <https://time.com/6230469/disability-users-twitter-elon-musk/>; Louise Vallée, *Losing the Last Thread*, Slate (Nov. 14, 2022), <https://slate.com/technology/2022/11/twitter-disability-chronic-illness-community-diagnosis-medical-funds.html>.

⁴ Aisha Malik, *Twitter's new opt-in feature will remind you to add alt text to photo uploads*, TechCrunch (Sept. 20, 2022), <https://techcrunch.com/2022/09/20/twitters-remind-add-alt-text-photo-uploads/>.

⁵ Amanda Silberling, *Twitter adds auto captions feature to make videos more accessible*, TechCrunch (Dec. 14, 2021), <https://techcrunch.com/2021/12/14/twitter-adds-auto-captions-feature-to-make-videos-more-accessible/>.

⁶ *Designing accessible sounds: The story behind our new chirps*, Twitter Design (Oct. 26, 2022), https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/product/2022/designing-accessible-sounds-story-behind-our-new-chirps.

disabilities. Following the Team's elimination, Twitter Spaces no longer allows users to turn on automatic closed captions, preventing users who are deaf or hard of hearing from engaging with Spaces.⁷ Additionally, the decision to no longer allow third-party app functionality with Twitter has eliminated necessary accessibility tools for disabled users.⁸ For example, many people who are blind and low vision preferred using third-party apps that were more compatible with screen readers than Twitter itself, but those apps are no longer available.⁹ Your most recent decision to charge a fee for access to Twitter's application programming interface (API) has sparked concerns that automated accounts that help users write alt-text for images, will cease to exist.¹⁰ All of these changes under your leadership signal a disregard for the needs of disabled people. Consequently, Twitter users with disabilities are questioning their ability to continue to use the platform,¹¹ and many have already left it entirely.¹²

In light of these concerning developments, I ask you to respond in writing to the following questions by March 17, 2023:

1. Please explain why you eliminated Twitter's Accessibility Team.
2. Will you commit to immediately restoring Twitter's Accessibility Team? If not, why not?
3. In November, before you eliminated Twitter's Accessibility Team, it announced several upcoming projects, including improving both image description education and the closed caption button for users.¹³ What is the status of each of those projects?
4. What resources is Twitter devoting to the creation and maintenance of accessibility features for disabled individuals on the platform?
5. Is Twitter compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) and the accessibility regulations of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) under the *Communications and Video Accessibility Act* and other relevant laws?
6. Please explain why Twitter Spaces no longer includes automatic closed captioning features. Will Twitter commit to reinstating automatic closed captioning for Twitter Spaces? If not, why not?

⁷ Jay Peters, *Twitter has removed captions from Spaces on iOS, and they don't work on the web or Android*, The Verge (Feb. 23, 2023), <https://www.theverge.com/2023/2/23/23612307/twitter-spaces-captions-removed-broken-ios-web-android>.

⁸ Gerard K. Cohen (@geradkcohen), Twitter (Jan. 13, 2023, 3:32 PM),

https://twitter.com/geradkcohen/status/1613997444492316673?s=20&t=O2S-kqvzREMIImNE_4BFNCg.

⁹ Steven Aquino, *The Iconfactory Co-Founder Gedeon Maheux Talks Accessibility on Twitter, 'The Blow' of Losing Twiterrific In New Interview*, Forbes (Jan. 25, 2023), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenaquino/2023/01/25/the-iconfactory-co-founder-gedeon-maheux-talks-accessibility-on-twitter-the-blow-of-losing-twiterrific-in-new-interview/?sh=278fd9e07943>.

¹⁰ Chase DiBenedetto, *Twitter is getting rid of its free API tier. That's a nightmare for accessibility activists.*, Mashable (Feb. 3, 2023), <https://mashable.com/article/twitter-api-accessibility-bots>.

¹¹ Marlee Matlin (@MarleeMatlin), Twitter (Nov. 17, 2022),

<https://twitter.com/MarleeMatlin/status/1593384980897353729>.

¹² Nad1880 (@NAD1880), Twitter (Nov. 10, 2022, 10:50 AM),

<https://twitter.com/NAD1880/status/1590733573019291648>.

¹³ Twitter Accessibility (@TwitterA11y), Twitter (Nov. 1, 2022),

https://twitter.com/TwitterA11y/status/1587533210354946049?s=20&t=rXEY09jifveXgV_k2aBsqg.

Elon Musk
Page 3
February 24, 2023

7. Will Twitter allow third-party apps to provide accessibility services for users with disabilities? If not, why not?
8. Will Twitter commit to allowing automated accounts that increase accessibility on the platform without the need for providers to pay fees? If not, why not?
9. Will Twitter commit to changing its default settings to remind all users to include alt-text on all photos and images? If not, why not?
10. Will Twitter commit to creating user-friendly closed captioning tools for users when they upload videos? If not, why not?
11. Will Twitter commit to creating user-friendly audio description tools for users when they upload videos? If not, why not?

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator