

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

2138 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6216

(202) 225-6906
judiciary.house.gov

February 23, 2024

Ms. Ingrid Ciprián-Matthews
President
CBS News
524 W. 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Ms. Ciprián-Matthews:

On February 13, 2024, Paramount Global, the parent company for CBS Broadcasting and CBS News, terminated the employment of renowned, award-winning journalist Catherine Herridge.¹ Notably, prior to her termination, Ms. Herridge gained significant notoriety as one of the few reporters “who [is] investigating the Hunter Biden laptop scandal”² and “cover[s] investigations into the Biden family.”³ According to news reports, Ms. Herridge’s termination “stunned [her] co-workers”⁴ and drew the ire of “[v]iewers and journalists alike.”⁵ Currently Ms. Herridge is, and at the time of her termination was, engaged in a First Amendment-based legal dispute in which a federal judge threatened to hold her in contempt and levy significant fines if she did not divulge sources who gave her information about a federal investigation.⁶

Upon terminating Ms. Herridge, CBS News, “in an ‘unprecedented move,’” allegedly seized Ms. Herridge’s “personal files [that] most likely contain confidential material from [Ms.] Herridge’s stints at both Fox and CBS.”⁷ This move by CBS News has reportedly “left many

¹ Alexandra Steigrad, *Bloodbath at Paramount claims 800 jobs including CBS News journalists embroiled in controversy*, N.Y. POST (Feb. 13, 2024).

² Alexandra Steigrad, *CBS seizes confidential files of fired reporter pursuing Hunter Biden laptop story in ‘unprecedented’ move: sources*, N.Y. POST (Feb. 23, 2024) (hereinafter “Unprecedented”).

³ Keith Griffith, *CBS News fires journalist who investigated Biden family and ‘SEIZES her personal notes and research’ with union accusing network of violating her First Amendment rights*, DAILYMAIL.com (Feb. 23, 2024).

⁴ *Unprecedented*, *supra* note 2.

⁵ Alexandra Steigrad, *CBS sparks outrage over firing of Catherine Herridge, ‘lone voice’ at network probing Hunter Biden laptop*, N.Y. POST (Feb. 14, 2024).

⁶ Jeremy Barr, *A CBS reporter refusing to reveal her sources could be held in contempt*, WASH. POST (Dec. 8, 2023). Ms. Herridge’s case is “being closely watched by journalists nationwide” and “is worrying First Amendment advocates.”, *Bloodbath*, *supra* note 3.

⁷ *Unprecedented*, *supra* note 2.

staffers shaken” because the network “want[s] to see what damaging documents [Ms. Herridge] has.”⁸

SAG-AFTRA, which represents on-air talent, condemned CBS News’ actions and stated that its conduct was “deeply concerning to the union because it sets a dangerous precedent for all media professionals and threatens the very foundation of the First Amendment.”⁹ The union stated that it is “completely inappropriate for an employer to lay off a reporter and take the very unusual step of retaining and searching the reporter’s files, inclusive of confidential source identification and information.”¹⁰ The union also explained that “[f]rom a First Amendment standpoint, a media corporation with a commitment to journalism calling a reporter’s research and confidential source reporting ‘proprietary information’ is both shocking and absurd.”¹¹

The Committee on the Judiciary is charged with upholding and protecting fundamental civil liberties, including the First Amendment. The unprecedented actions of CBS News threaten to chill good journalism and ultimately weaken our nation’s commitment to a free press. Accordingly, to assist with our oversight, we ask that you please provide the following information:

1. A briefing to the Committee concerning the individual(s) at Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting, Inc., or CBS News who made the decision to terminate Ms. Herridge and the reasons for such termination, including the decision to seize Ms. Herridge’s confidential materials as a part of this termination;
2. All documents and communications referring or relating to the universe of individuals at Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting, Inc., or CBS News who had access to Ms. Herridge’s confidential materials following her termination; and
3. All documents and communications referring or relating to whether any individual or individuals from Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting, Inc., or CBS News accessed Ms. Herridge’s confidential materials, reviewed any of her confidential materials, copied or retained any of her confidential materials, or conducted any forensic examination of her confidential materials.

Please produce all documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on March 1, 2024.

Pursuant to the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee has jurisdiction to conduct oversight of matters concerning constitutional amendments to inform potential

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Ted Johnson, *SAG-AFTRA Condemns CBS News Over Report On Catherine Herridge, But Network Disputes That It Seized Her Files After Layoff*, DEADLINE (Feb. 22, 2024).

¹⁰ *Id.* (The retention of a media professional’s reporting materials by their former employer is a serious break with traditional practices which supports the immediate return of reporting materials.”).

¹¹ *Id.*

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legislative reforms.¹² If you have any questions, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-6906. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Jordan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Jordan
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Jerrold L. Nadler, Ranking Member

¹² Rules of the House of Representatives, R. X (2023).