



September 24, 2025

Mr. Wayne Connell
Chief Human Resources Officer
The Washington Post
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Connell:

We represent Karen Attiah in relation to her wrongful termination by *The Washington Post*.

Ms. Attiah did not engage in any misconduct, much less in the “gross misconduct” you allege in your letter of September 11, 2025. Rather, she did precisely the job you hired her to do as an opinion writer and acted fully in compliance with *The Post’s* own social media policy. She spoke truthfully and forcefully about matters of vital public concern, and her performance is worthy of praise – not condemnation – for speaking difficult truths at a challenging time.

Ms. Attiah was clear in condemning the murder of Charlie Kirk (“Murder is wrong”) as we all do. She spoke out against all political violence. (“Political violence has no place in this country”). At the same time, she did her job in addressing the full context of the killing. For example, she pointed out that America has been unwilling to seriously address political violence and gun violence generally. (“I wish I had hope for gun control; and that I could believe ‘political violence has no place in this country.’ But we live in a country that accepts white children being massacred by violence.”). And, while referencing the political assassinations in Minnesota earlier this year, she also pointed out that historically politically motivated violence has been perpetrated by white men. (“Part of what keeps America so violent is the insistence that people perform care, empty goodness, and absolution for white men who espouse hatred and violence.”). That reflects the well-established evidence that political violence is disproportionately committed by right-wing actors, including white supremacists. For example, the [CATO Institute](#) found that, over the past half-century (excluding 9/11), right-wing terrorists were responsible for 63% of politically motivated murders, while left-wing terrorists accounted for about 10.5%. CATO Institute, *Politically Motivated Violence Is Rare in the United States*, CATO At Liberty (September 11, 2025). The [Anti-Defamation League](#) reports that all the extremist-related killings from 2022 through 2024 were committed by (or connected to) right-wing extremists, including white supremacists. Anti-Defamation League, *Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2024*, ADL Center on Extremism (February 21, 2025).

Ms. Attiah, in the service of exercising journalistic caution during a fast-breaking news event, also noted the rush to blame the left for the murder of Mr. Kirk even before any facts were known. (“What’s crazy is that we don’t know who the shooter is, or what the motivation for shooting was. But already, rhetorical charges of political terrorism, and blaming the left.”). Relatedly, Ms. Attiah pointed out the double standards surrounding political violence. (“Remember two Democratic legislators were shot in Minnesota just this year. And America



shrugged and moved on.”). Support for the fact that the right often misrepresents the origins of political violence can be found in the Department of Justice’s apparent treatment of a report it funded which concluded that “[m]ilitant, nationalistic, white supremacist violent extremism has increased in the United States. In fact, the number of far-right attacks continues to outpace all other types of terrorism and domestic violent extremism.” National Institute of Justice, *What NIJ Research Tells About Domestic Terrorism*, NIJ Journal (June 2024). The DOJ apparently deleted that report from its website shortly after the Kirk murder – just as you are seeking to delete Ms. Attiah and her opinions from *The Post*. USA Today, *Study showing 'far-right extremists' have committed more violence removed from DOJ website*, (September 17, 2025).

Ms. Attiah presented her opinions while condemning Mr. Kirk’s killing but at the same time refused to engage in “performative mourning” for a man who impugned Black women,¹ put academics on watch lists,² claimed that Black people were better off in the era of Jim Crow,³ said that the Civil Rights Act was a mistake,⁴ and promoted a book that called liberals “Unhumans.”⁵

Ms. Attiah presented all of these well-supported opinions in precisely the manner *The Post* employed her to do – as an opinion journalist using social media to comment on critical issues of the day. The collective bargaining agreement between *The Post* and the Washington-Baltimore News Guild (of which Ms. Attiah is a member) provides that “[n]o employee shall be discharged except for good and sufficient cause” (CBA at Art. X 3(a)) and that “[n]othing herein, however, shall diminish the Publisher’s obligation under this Section to take such disciplinary action only for just cause...” (CBA Art.X3(c)). It is ludicrous to suggest that there is cause for termination of an opinion writer where she expresses her opinions and those opinions are well-supported by the evidence, and she does so with candor and honesty. While your termination letter (attached to this letter) references *The Post*’s social media policy and its “prohibit[ion on] postings that disparage people based on their race, gender or other protected characteristics,” her postings did no such thing. Rather they spoke candidly and truthfully about the demographic makeup of most political violence in this country. Those truths may be difficult to hear; but they hardly constitute disparagement based on race or gender. Moreover, the policy expressly permits opinion writers like Ms. Attiah “to advocate for causes, issues, governmental policies or political or judicial outcomes” and to express “a partisan point of view on an issue.”

¹ See, e.g., *The Charlie Kirk Show*, July 13, 2023, (“If we would have said that Joy Reid and Michelle Obama and Sheila Jackson Lee and Ketanji Brown Jackson were affirmative action picks, we would have been called racists. Now they’re coming out and they’re saying it for us ... You do not have the brain processing power to otherwise be taken really seriously. You had to go steal a white person’s slot to go be taken somewhat seriously.”); *The Charlie Kirk Show*, January 3, 2024, (“If I’m dealing with somebody in customer service who’s a moronic Black woman, I wonder is she there because of her excellence, or is she there because of affirmative action?”).

² BBC News, “The group that wants to 'out' liberal professors,” November 26, 2016.

³ Jubilee, “1 Conservative vs 25 Liberal College Students (Feat. Charlie Kirk) | Surrounded”, September 8, 2024.

⁴ WIRED, “How Charlie Kirk Plans to Discredit Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Act,” January 12, 2024.

⁵ Human Events, “MUST WATCH: Charlie Kirk, Jack Posobiec, and Joshua Lisec discuss the secret history of the Russian Revolution in Unhumans,” July 6, 2024.



We do not yet know whether *The Post* took this blatantly illegal action at the urging of Administration officials, although there is ample reason to ask the question. We intend to investigate the alternative as well – whether this action was taken in bad faith out of fear that the Administration would take or threaten to take some action against *The Post*.

Relevant to those determinations, *The Post* or its owner, Jeff Bezos, has been heavily criticized for transforming the publication and especially the editorial page in an attempt to find a way into the good graces of the Administration⁶ and for finding ways to put money into the Trump family’s pockets through Amazon, including a contribution of \$1 million to Trump’s inauguration⁷ and paying \$40 million for a documentary about Melania Trump.⁸

The Post’s unlawful action against Ms. Attiah must, moreover, be viewed in the context of the intimidation campaign President Trump and his Administration have waged to silence those who criticize him and the actions and policies of his Administration. America was built on the principle of free speech and vigorous debate on matters of public interest. Yet President Trump and his administration have taken unprecedented actions to suppress that debate, most recently with respect to the Walt Disney Company, ABC and Jimmy Kimmel.⁹ We intend to determine whether there was direct or indirect pressure to wrongfully terminate Ms. Attiah.

It is against this backdrop of direct and indirect speech suppression that *The Post*’s firing of Ms. Attiah must and will be viewed. Ms. Attiah’s posts engaged on a matter of critical importance – the origins of political violence in America – and provided an accurate and vital reality check on the false narrative that the left has been responsible for most political violence in the country. By silencing a voice of truth, *The Post*’s firing of Ms. Attiah contributes to the falsehoods the Administration perpetuates about political violence.

In any event, *The Post* had no grounds to terminate Ms. Attiah. It has utterly failed to comply with the CBA, with applicable law, and to stand for the principles of free speech and democracy it professes to hold. Ms. Attiah has spent her entire career dedicated to championing press freedom around the world. Prior to joining *The Post*, she was a Fulbright scholar on media in Ghana and an analyst for Freedom House. While at *The Post*, she gained an international reputation as the founding Global Opinions editor, where she built a platform for challenged and banned writers from around the world. She stood by these free speech values in the aftermath of the murder of Saudi journalist and *Post* Global Opinions columnist Jamal Khashoggi, whom she

⁶ See, e.g., The Atlantic, “Where Jeff Bezos Went Wrong With The Washington Post,” March 3, 2025 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/03/bezos-appease-trump-administration/681899/>.

⁷ CBS News, “Meta, Amazon and tech CEOs make \$1 million investments in Trump’s inauguration,” December 16, 2024 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-tech-ceos-meta-amazon-donate-millions-inauguration/>.

⁸ Rolling Stone, “Amazon Is Paying \$40 Million for Melania Trump Vanity Doc: Report,” January 7, 2025 <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/amazon-paying-license-melania-trump-documentary-1235227761/>.

⁹ CNN, “How Brendan Carr, the attack-dog FCC chair, helped take down Jimmy Kimmel with words, not actions,” September 18, 2025 <https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/18/media/brendan-carr-jimmy-kimmel-fcc-first-amendment>; TIME, “Kimmel and Colbert Cancellations Reveal Trump’s Media Suppression Strategy, Experts Warn,” September 18, 2025 <https://time.com/7318661/jimmy-kimmel-cancelled-trump-fired-colbert/>.



hired.¹⁰ At the time, *The Post* stood behind her and Khashoggi’s memory, pledging to hold power to account and against censorship.¹¹ Ms. Attiah is now a victim, through *The Post*’s actions, of the assault on free speech and democracy.

In sum, beyond the violation of the CBA, *The Post*’s silencing of its only Black female opinion writer raises many deeply troubling issues, including under the First Amendment, other legal authorities, and other matters of public policy. Press freedoms in the United States are at deeply troubling lows already – according to Reporters Without Borders’ *World Press Freedom Index* this year, the United States currently ranks 57th – and non-white journalists in the United States have been particularly subject to threats and harassment. *Journalists Sense Turmoil in Their Industry Amid Continued Passion for Their Work*, Pew Research Center (June 14, 2022). *The Post*’s firing of Ms. Attiah only accelerates those trends. She intends with her response to *The Post*’s actions both to shed light on the real causes and implications of her termination and to recover for the severe damage those actions have caused her, her personal safety, her reputation, and her career.

Please let us know if *The Post* wishes to discuss how to set these wrongs right. If not, we intend to pursue all appropriate remedies for her sake, that of media freedom, and of our democracy itself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Norman L. Eisen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Norman Eisen
Katie Phang
Stephen Jonas
Craig Becker

Democracy Defenders Fund
Counsel for Karen Attiah

Attachment: September 11, 2025 Letter From *The Washington Post*

¹⁰ See, e.g., WRAL News, “Karen Attiah, Jamal Khashoggi’s Editor, Speaks About the Writer and His Work,” October 18, 2018 <https://www.wral.com/story/karen-attiah-jamal-khashoggi-s-editor-speaks-about-the-writer-and-his-work/17925268/>.

¹¹ See, e.g., POLITICO, “Washington Post to run full-page ad on Khashoggi killing,” December 13, 2018 <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/13/washington-post-ad-friday-jamal-khashoggi-1063440>.

The Washington Post

Karen Attiah

September 11, 2025

[REDACTED]

Karen,

I am writing to inform you that The Post is terminating your employment effective immediately for gross misconduct. Your public comments on social media regarding the death of Charlie Kirk violate The Post's social media policies, harm the integrity of our organization, and potentially endanger the physical safety of our staff.

Among other requirements, the Company-wide social media policy mandates that all employee social media postings be respectful and prohibits postings that disparage people based on their race, gender or other protected characteristics. The policy also reminds employees that everything they post is a reflection on the Company and should not affect the integrity of The Post's journalism. Your postings on Bluesky (which clearly identifies you as a Post Columnist) about white men in response to the killing of Charlie Kirk do not comply with our policy. For example, you posted: "Refusing to tear my clothes and smear ashes on my face in performative mourning for a white man that espoused violence is.... not the same as violence" and "Part of what keeps America so violent is the insistence that people perform care, empty goodness and absolution for white men who espouse hatred and violence."

In addition, just last year, Opinions leadership asked everyone in the Opinions Department to review the newsroom social media guidelines, attached those guidelines to an email to the Department for review, and reiterated in that email the "bedrock principle that our use of social media must never harm the journalistic integrity or reputation of The Post".

The poor judgment exhibited by your public comments regarding Charlie Kirk arise against the backdrop of documented performance concerns, which have been raised with you. Given these concerns, and in light of your recent unacceptable Bluesky posts, we cannot tolerate the risk your performance poses to The Post.

Please remove any reference to your affiliation with The Washington Post on any public-facing profiles immediately.

You will receive a separate letter from The Post's Benefits Department concerning your eligibility for any other Post benefits upon termination.

In the event that you have left any personal items on the premises, we will make arrangements to return them to you and for you to return any Post equipment you have in your possession.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "L. Wayne Connell".

Wayne Connell
Chief HR Officer
The Washington Post

Two black rectangular redaction boxes covering contact information, likely a phone number and an email address.