

1 DESIREE GUERRIERE TOWNSEND

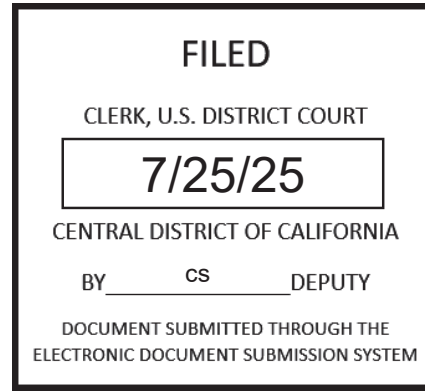
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6 PLAINTIFF *IN PRO SE*



7 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

8 CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA, WESTERN DIVISION

9 DESIREE GUERRIERE TOWNSEND, an
10 individual,

11 Plaintiff,

12 v.

13 PARAMOUNT GLOBAL, a Delaware
14 corporation; CBS BROADCASTING
15 INC., a New York corporation, and
INSIDE EDITION INC., a New York
Corporation,

16 Defendants.

Case No.: 2:25-CV-04077-MRA-DFMx

FIRST AMENDED COMPLAINT FOR:

- 17 (1) DEFAMATION
- 18 (2) FALSE LIGHT INVASION OF PRIVACY
- 19 (3) INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF
EMOTIONAL DISTRESS
- 20 (4) VIOLATION OF CALIFORNIA CIVIL
CODE §3344
- 21 (5) VIOLATIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA
UNRUH CIVIL RIGHTS ACT (CAL. CIV.
CODE § 51)
- 22 (6) VIOLATIONS OF THE AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT (42 U.S.C. § 12182)
- 23 (7) NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION, HIRING, AND
RETENTION

24 ACTION FILED: May 7, 2025

25 TRIAL DATE: TBD

1 Plaintiff Desiree Guerriere Townsend (“Townsend”) complains of Defendants PARAMOUNT
2 GLOBAL (together with its affiliates and subsidiaries, “Paramount”), CBS BROADCASTING INC.
3 (together with their affiliates and subsidiaries, collectively referred to as “CBS”) and INSIDE EDITION
4 INC. (together with their affiliates and subsidiaries, collectively referred to as “Inside Edition”),
5 (Paramount, CBS, and Inside Edition are collectively referred to herein as the “Defendants”) and alleges
6 as follows:

7
8 **NATURE OF THE ACTION**

9 **“It is one of the most talked about stories we've ever had on Inside Edition.”**

10 - Deborah Norville, *Inside Edition*, “Flu Shot Woman”

11
12 1. This is a civil action for defamation, false light invasion of privacy, violation of
13 California Civil Code § 3344, intentional infliction of emotional distress, disability discrimination
14 under both the California Unruh Civil Rights Act and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act,
15 and negligent supervision, hiring, and retention. Plaintiff Desiree Guerriere Townsend brings this
16 action against Defendants Inside Edition, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Paramount Global for their
17 collective roles in producing, distributing, materially modifying, and enabling the viral republication
18 of a deceptive and defamatory broadcast segment—one which the Defendants have since admitted to
19 removing. The segment grossly misrepresented Plaintiff’s medically diagnosed neurological disability
20 and was crafted not to inform the public, but to exploit her condition for profit and entertainment under
21 the guise of legitimate news reporting.
22

23 2. Plaintiff is a private individual and not a public figure under prevailing defamation law.
24 Despite the Plaintiff’s background as a former NFL cheerleader ambassador, the high-profile status of
25 the Defendants and the seriousness of the allegations—including a concurrent defamation lawsuit
26 against actor Mario Lopez, a retaliatory restraining order he initiated but was unprepared to argue at a
27

July 11, 2025 hearing, and a widely circulated video of his process service that has garnered nearly 16 million views—Plaintiff’s affairs have received virtually no media coverage. Furthermore, this lack of press interest persists despite Plaintiff’s publicly declared intention to run for Mayor of Los Angeles in the 2026 election, as evidenced by the mere 26 followers as of July 25, 2025 on a social media page dedicated to her campaign¹, further underscoring her limited relevance in the public sphere. The near-total absence of media interest in Plaintiff’s affairs, whether legal, political, or personal, underscores the lack of public relevance ascribed to her. This evidentiary silence further supports Plaintiff’s classification as a private individual entitled to the heightened protections afforded under California defamation law.

3. Inside Edition portrayed Plaintiff in an outrageously defamatory and dehumanizing false light, reducing her to the demeaning moniker of the “flu shot woman” and stripping her of dignity, medical context, and truth. Defendants deliberately crafted and packaged a grotesque caricature of her neurological disability—stripped of compassion and accuracy—for mass consumption. This distorted image was broadcast nationally, becoming one of Defendants’ most-watched segments before it was quietly removed from their platforms in an explicit admission of guilt. Despite its removal, Defendants have tacitly permitted its republication by third parties, including celebrities, allowing the defamatory content to continue circulating for the sake of virality and engagement. All of this was done to generate profit, shamelessly exploiting Plaintiff’s suffering, identity, and likeness to sell household products such as detergent, diapers, and air freshener, turning a real woman’s medical crisis into a sideshow for corporate gain.

4. This calculated “playbook” was not an isolated incident, but rather reflects systemic negligence in the hiring, training, and oversight practices of Inside Edition and its parent companies.

¹ Plaintiff’s intention to run for Mayor of Los Angeles, along with her associated campaign TikTok page launched on or about April 6, 2025, can be accessed at: <https://www.tiktok.com/@desiree4la>.

1 The Defendants have consistently enabled and rewarded a pattern of editorial misconduct—one that
2 relies on inflammatory, dehumanizing portrayals of vulnerable individuals to provoke public outrage
3 and drive advertising revenue. This life-destroying tactic has been used repeatedly to convert human
4 suffering into profit, and it remains in use to this day. In fact, a nearly identical strategy was deployed
5 in 2018 against Plaintiff’s friend, actor James Franco—another target distorted into a caricature for
6 mass consumption. Like Plaintiff, Mr. Franco was falsely depicted in a demeaning light, not for the
7 sake of journalism, but as a clickbait commodity to sell household cleaning products, fast food, and
8 delivery pizza services. The trauma inflicted by Defendants’ media exploitation forged a bond between
9 Plaintiff and Mr. Franco, two individuals who, in different moments, took turns pulling each other back
10 from the brink of suicide caused by the reputational and psychological devastation wrought by this
11 reckless, monetized cruelty.
12

13 5. The Defendants’ conduct towards Plaintiff, and others, mirrors a modern-day version of
14 *The Scarlet Letter*, in which a woman is publicly marked, shamed, and cast out for a narrative she did
15 not author. Like Hester Prynne, Plaintiff was made the subject of a distorted public narrative—this time
16 through national broadcast defamation, malicious republishing, and digital permanence—resulting in
17 reputational destruction, public distrust, social isolation, and financial ruin. Defendants compounded
18 their negligence through sustained cruelty and a calculated intent to marginalize Plaintiff’s documented
19 and previously disclosed disability. As Plaintiff stated in a recent interview with Radar Online², “What
20 they did went far beyond defamation; it was so malicious it bordered on attempted murder,” given that
21 the level of cruelty, targeted prosecution, and prolonged social isolation was so extreme, it appears
22 purposefully designed to drive victims toward suicide. This is not hyperbole. It reflects the severe and
23
24

25
26 ² Plaintiff’s public statements regarding the harm inflicted by Defendants, both to herself and to actor James Franco, are
27 detailed in a July 21, 2025 article published by Radar Online, available at: <https://radaronline.com/p/mario-lopez-defamation-accuser-sues-inside-edition-paramount-james-franco/>.
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ongoing psychological and economic harm caused by Paramount Global's editorial choices, deliberate actions designed to exile Plaintiff and similarly situated individuals from their professions and communities by imposing a false and indelible narrative, marked by a permanent brand of public disgrace.

6. In promotional materials submitted as a specimen to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on or about September 10, 2008 for the mark INSIDE EDITION, U.S. Reg. No. 1,557,311 (upon information and belief, owned by Inside Edition's subsidiary, King World Productions, Inc.) Defendants proudly branded the program as "the new face of reality," using an apparent image of Princess Diana, an individual whose life and tragic death came to symbolize the dangers of media intrusion and exploitation. In what appears to be a 1989 marketing campaign—evidenced by the USPTO's January 1989 stamp—Defendants celebrated the program's formula of sensationalizing the lives of "the rich, famous, and powerful" for entertainment and advertising revenue. Framing this as "true life success," Defendants effectively branded their editorial mission as the commercial harvesting



TRUE LIFE SUCCESS.

The extraordinary people who excite the world are a big part of why INSIDE EDITION is the season's hottest program entry. The rich, famous and powerful are part of the dynamic programming formula that's given a

lackluster season its single bright promise for long-term success. INSIDE EDITION is the big idea whose time has come. In the first few days of marketing, here's what happened:



10 days. 19 markets. 36% of the country.

New York	WNBC	NBC	Miami	WCIX	TVX Broadcast Group
Los Angeles	KCBS	CBS	Hartford	WFSB	Post-Newsweek
Chicago	WMAQ	NBC	San Diego	KCST	Gillett
Philadelphia	WCAU	CBS	Kansas City	KMBC	Hearst Broadcasting
San Francisco	KRON	Chronicle Broadcasting	Milwaukee	WTTI	Gillett
Detroit	WDIV	Post-Newsweek	Oklahoma City	KWTV	Griffin Television
Minneapolis	WCCO	Midwest Communications	Dayton	WDTN	Hearst Broadcasting
Atlanta	WAGA	Gillett	West Palm Beach	WPEC	Photo Electronics Corp.
Tampa	WTVT	WTVT Holdings	Jacksonville	WJXT	Post-Newsweek
			Fort Myers	WINK	Fort Myers Broadcasting

We premiere January 9th and INSIDE EDITION is on its way, heading for the top, right along side WHEEL, JEOPARDY and OPRAH. In the most competitive season ever, INSIDE EDITION is a reality, a promise and an opportunity no station can afford to miss. Call your KING WORLD representative today.



KINGWORLD

Some people handle reality better than others.

1 of human suffering, laying the groundwork for a broadcast model that thrives on public shaming,
2 tabloid storytelling, and emotional harm.

3 7. The tragic irony that Princess Diana—used in Inside Edition’s USPTO specimen to
4 represent the “new reality”—would later die while fleeing paparazzi pressure only **underscores the**
5 **deeply embedded and dangerous ethos of Paramount Global’s programming strategy.** This
6 specimen demonstrates that Plaintiff’s experience, and that of her friend James Franco, was not an
7 aberration, but a continuation of a decades-long pattern of reckless disregard for human dignity,
8 privacy, and safety. Defendants have pushed individuals to the brink of psychological collapse and near
9 death, all in service of ratings and detergent commercials. Fortunately for Defendants, both Plaintiff
10 and Mr. Franco have managed to survive the punishing “reality” crafted by Inside Edition, though not
11 without lasting harm. Or, as Defendants themselves once marketed it: “Some people handle reality
12 better than others.”
13

14 8. These harms to Plaintiff reflect a decades-long pattern of damage that has culminated in
15 nearly twenty years of sustained online harassment, emboldening third parties within the entertainment
16 and media industries to engage in further misconduct. Hollywood personality Mario Lopez has engaged
17 in defamatory conduct **directly traceable to the defamatory narrative first advanced by Defendants**
18 (See *Townsend v. Lopez*, Los Angeles Superior Court Case No. 25NNCV04089). Additionally, even
19 journalists and media figures have repeatedly and willfully infringed upon Plaintiff’s federally
20 registered copyrights by misappropriating her protected creative works without authorization, often
21 attempting to justify such use by invoking the false narrative propagated by Defendants (See *Townsend*
22 *v. Morrissey et al.*, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York, Case No. 1:24-CV-07151-OEM-
23 MMH). Plaintiff has since become the target of a retaliatory restraining order, primarily aimed at
24 suppressing her protected speech, after initiating a defamation lawsuit against Mario Lopez. (See *Lopez*
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1 *v. Townsend*, Los Angeles Superior Court, Case No. 25STRO03858). The restraining order hearing
2 was subsequently continued by the Court, due to Lopez's counsel's lack of preparedness, resulting in
3 an unjust and temporary deprivation of Plaintiff's legal rights, all of which are, again, **directly**
4 **traceable to the Defendants' original defamatory broadcast and false narrative.** This reckless
5 disregard for the truth further paved the way for Plaintiff to be subjected to stalking, harassment, and
6 threats of violence from emboldened individuals who relied on the broadcast's false narrative as
7 justification for their conduct³.

8
9 9. Despite being given a clear opportunity to correct the record, Defendants willfully
10 refused to issue any clarification, retraction, or update. Instead, they responded with legal threats aimed
11 at deterring Plaintiff from pursuing this action. This deliberate inaction—paired with the threat of an
12 aggressive, retaliatory legal strategy, including the filing of an anti-SLAPP motion—not only ratified
13 the original defamatory narrative but actively amplified it across platforms and over time. By doing so,
14 Defendants sought to intimidate Plaintiff into silence while allowing a knowingly false portrayal to
15 metastasize unchecked, resulting in profound reputational harm, ongoing emotional distress, social
16 isolation, and significant economic loss. Most egregiously, Defendants' conduct constituted unlawful
17 disability discrimination: despite being in possession of medical documentation, they portrayed
18 Plaintiff's neurological disability as either fabricated or a symptom of mental instability. This reckless
19 mischaracterization reinforced harmful stereotypes, delegitimized her condition, and denied her the
20 dignity and legal protections afforded under state and federal disability rights laws.

21
22 10. Furthermore, the harm inflicted upon Plaintiff and others stems in large part from
23 Defendants' negligent hiring and supervision of senior editorial personnel, including anchor Deborah
24 Norville and Executive Producer Charles Lachman. Both individuals were instrumental in producing
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26
27 ³ Thousands of hateful, demeaning, and derogatory comments, shaped by the false narrative propagated by Defendants, can
28 be found on Plaintiff's personal TikTok page: <https://www.tiktok.com/@cheerleader4change>.

1 and promoting the original defamatory broadcast about Plaintiff and were later involved in a similarly
2 damaging broadcast concerning James Franco. Despite their central role in content that resulted in
3 widespread reputational harm based on false narratives, neither Norville nor Lachman faced
4 professional accountability or editorial restraint. Instead, Defendants continued to place editorial
5 authority in their hands, enabling a pattern of reckless, sensationalized reporting that has caused
6 irreparable damage to Plaintiff and others.

7
8 11. This lawsuit seeks to hold Defendants accountable for weaponizing their media platform
9 to deliberately dismantle a woman's life, reputation, and career. Paramount Global, through its
10 subsidiaries CBS Broadcasting Inc. and Inside Edition Inc., chose mockery over truth, cruelty over
11 ethics, and silence over accountability. In the process, they not only destroyed individual dignity but
12 created lasting emotional wreckage so severe that it forged a trauma bond between Plaintiff and actor
13 James Franco, two people who met not through fame or fortune, but through shared devastation
14 inflicted by the same corporate machine. **No friendship, no human connection, should be born from**
15 **mutual survival of a media empire's ruthless appetite for humiliation and profit.** This lawsuit is
16 not only a demand for legal redress, but a reckoning with the cost of commodifying suffering for ratings.
17

18 PARTIES

19
20 12. Plaintiff Desiree Guerriere Townsend ("Plaintiff") is a litigation and intellectual property
21 paralegal residing in Los Angeles, California.

22 13. Defendant Paramount Global is a Delaware corporation with its principal place of
23 business in New York, New York. Paramount operates as a multinational media conglomerate and is
24 publicly traded on the NASDAQ exchange under the ticker symbol PARA. Paramount owns and
25 controls CBS Broadcasting Inc. and CBS Interactive Inc., and accordingly, exercises substantial
26 authority over CBS's commercial operations, editorial decisions, and broadcast content.
27

1 14. Paramount Global is a Delaware corporation with its principal place of business in New
2 York, New York. Paramount maintains significant operations in California, including offices in Los
3 Angeles, and owns and controls CBS Broadcasting Inc. and other affiliated entities that produce and
4 disseminate media content throughout the state. Paramount is authorized to do business in California
5 and may be served through its registered agent for service of process in California: Corporation Service
6 Company d/b/a CSC – Lawyers Incorporating Service Company, 2710 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite
7 150N, Sacramento, CA 95833.

8
9 15. On July 7, 2024, Paramount Global announced a definitive agreement to merge with
10 Skydance Media in a transaction valued at approximately \$8,000,000,000. The proposed deal would
11 result in the formation of a new entity, tentatively named “New Paramount,” with an estimated
12 combined value of \$28,000,000,000. The transaction is subject to federal regulatory approval and is
13 currently under review by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) pursuant to its standard
14 180-day timeline for evaluating significant media mergers. If approved, the merger is expected to close
15 by October 2025.

16
17 16. Defendant CBS Broadcasting Inc. is a New York corporation with its principal place of
18 business in New York, New York. CBS Broadcasting Inc. is authorized to do business in the State of
19 California and operates media, television, and news programming distributed throughout the United
20 States, including significant operations within California. CBS is a wholly owned subsidiary of
21 Paramount Global and may be served through its registered agent for service of process in California:
22 Corporation Service Company d/b/a CSC – Lawyers Incorporating Service Company, 2710 Gateway
23 Oaks Drive, Suite 150N, Sacramento, CA 95833.

24
25 17. Defendant Inside Edition Inc. is a New York corporation with its principal place of
26 business in New York, New York. Inside Edition Inc. produces the nationally syndicated television
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1 program *Inside Edition*, which is distributed throughout the United States, including to viewers in
2 California via broadcast television and digital platforms. Inside Edition Inc. is a subsidiary or affiliated
3 entity of CBS Media Ventures, a division of Paramount Global. Inside Edition Inc. conducts business
4 in California through the commercial distribution of its programming. It may be served through its
5 California agent for service of process: Corporation Service Company d/b/a CSC – Lawyers
6 Incorporating Service, 2710 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 150N, Sacramento, California 95833.

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8 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

9 18. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), as there is complete
10 diversity of citizenship between the parties and the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000, exclusive
11 of interest and costs. Plaintiff Desiree Guerriere Townsend is a natural person domiciled in the State of
12 California. Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside Edition Inc. are
13 corporations organized under the laws of Delaware and New York, with their principal places of
14 business located in New York, New York. None of the Defendants are citizens of California for
15 purposes of diversity jurisdiction.
16

17 19. This Court also has supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state law claims pursuant
18 to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a), as they are so related to the claims within the Court's original jurisdiction that
19 they form part of the same case or controversy.
20

21 20. Venue is proper in this District pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2), as a substantial part
22 of the events and omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in this District. The defamatory broadcast
23 and related content at issue were disseminated in California, were accessible to California residents,
24 and caused harm to Plaintiff, who resides in this District. Defendants conduct extensive business in
25 California, including the production, distribution, and monetization of media content through broadcast
26 and digital platforms targeting California audiences.
27

21. This Court also has personal jurisdiction over all Defendants pursuant to California's long-arm statute, Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 410.10, which permits the exercise of jurisdiction on any basis not inconsistent with the United States Constitution. Defendants have purposefully availed themselves of the privilege of conducting business in California, including by broadcasting the defamatory segment within the state, maintaining ongoing business relationships with California-based media entities and advertisers, and generating substantial revenue from California-based viewership.

22. Paramount Global maintains significant business operations in California through its subsidiaries, including CBS Broadcasting Inc. and Inside Edition Inc., both of which regularly target California markets through national syndication and streaming platforms. Defendant Inside Edition Inc. continues to conduct business within the state through the distribution of its television program Inside Edition and derives commercial benefit from its California-based viewership.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

23. Upon information and belief, Inside Edition derives the vast majority of its revenue from commercial advertising sold around and within its broadcast segments. While the program purports to present factual “news” content, its business model centers on the exploitation of individuals, from private citizens to public figures, under the guise of journalism, with the true and primary intent of driving advertising revenue. This is evidenced by the sensationalistic nature of its programming, which regularly sacrifices truth, fairness, and context in favor of emotionally charged, clickbait-style narratives designed to captivate viewers and maximize ratings.

24. Tellingly, Inside Edition’s own trademark registration (U.S. Reg. No. 1,557,311) describes its services as: “**television entertainment services in the nature of a news and current events program.**” This hybrid classification of services reveals a deliberate conflation: positioning the show as “entertainment” for commercial and legal insulation, while simultaneously cloaking itself in

1 the credibility and protections afforded to legitimate “news” outlets. This contradiction lies at the heart
2 of Defendants’ misconduct. By straddling the boundary between entertainment and journalism,
3 Defendant Inside Edition cloaks defamatory and exploitative content in the costume of public interest,
4 while operating with the editorial freedom and commercial motives of a scripted reality show producer
5 where facts are secondary to spectacle, and truth is bent to fit a narrative designed to sell ads, not inform
6 the public. This blurred line forms the very basis of their legal and moral evasion, a weaponized form
7 of storytelling, that escapes scrutiny under the false pretense of news.
8

9 25. Within this blurred framework of entertainment disguised as news, Defendants willfully
10 exploited Plaintiff’s name, image, and medically diagnosed disability to create a sensationalized
11 narrative designed to provoke viewer outrage and engagement. By casting Plaintiff as a caricature of a
12 mentally unstable and deceitful cheerleader, Defendants transformed her into a marketable spectacle,
13 using her likeness not to inform the public, but to captivate it. This portrayal was then packaged with
14 paid advertisements, seamlessly monetizing public scorn as broadcast content. While masquerading as
15 constitutionally protected speech, this conduct was in fact commercial exploitation: designed and
16 executed not for genuine discourse on vaccine safety nor public health, but solely to increase ratings
17 and drive advertising revenue.
18

19 26. By invoking the First Amendment as a shield, Inside Edition attempts to evade
20 accountability for conduct that was fundamentally commercial in nature: the unauthorized use of
21 Plaintiff’s identity to increase viewership, justify higher ad rates, and generate profit. At no point did
22 Inside Edition express any genuine concern for vaccine safety, nor did the broadcast contain any
23 substantive or balanced discussion that could remotely justify the exploitation of Plaintiff’s diagnosed
24 neurological disability as a matter of public concern. This misuse of Plaintiff’s likeness under the false
25 pretense of news programming strips away any journalistic privilege and reveals the true purpose of
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1 the broadcast — not to educate, inform, or contribute meaningfully to public discourse, but to
2 commodify outrage at Plaintiff’s expense.

3 27. For nearly twenty years, Defendants have allowed their defamatory and misleading
4 broadcast to define the public image of Plaintiff Desiree Guerriere Townsend, formerly Desiree
5 Jennings, living with a rare neurological disability later diagnosed as Stiff Person Syndrome (SPS).
6 Plaintiff became the subject of national ridicule following a deceptive 2010 segment aired by Inside
7 Edition, which mischaracterized her disability and cast her in a false and humiliating light⁴. (See
8 **Exhibit A** attached hereto.)
9

10 28. Upon information and belief, the defamatory segment consisted of a press release, a
11 written article hosted on a dedicated page of Defendants’ website, and a video segment that originally
12 aired as part of a television broadcast and was also made available on a dedicated webpage and
13 distributed across Defendants’ branded digital platforms. Defendants have since admitted that the video
14 segment has been removed from their platforms. (See **Exhibit B** attached hereto.) This admission
15 supports the inference that Defendants were aware of the real-world harm caused by the segment and,
16 as such, removed it in an attempt to mitigate liability or public backlash.
17

18 29. What began as a misinformed media hit piece has metastasized into an unrelenting cycle
19 of viral humiliation. In April 2025, the same Inside Edition broadcast that had cast Plaintiff in a false
20 and defamatory light — a segment which, by CBS’s own admission, had been quietly removed from
21 official platforms — resurfaced across social media, triggering millions of views and an avalanche of
22 renewed online abuse. Thousands of hateful, derogatory, and threatening comments continue to flood
23 Plaintiff’s TikTok page, reflecting and amplifying the harmful narrative originally fabricated and
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27 ⁴ See *Inside Edition*, “Flu Shot Woman,” available at: <https://www.insideedition.com/159-flu-shot-woman> (last accessed July 22, 2025).

1 disseminated by Defendants. Defendants were immediately placed on notice and were sent a formal
2 retraction demand pursuant to California Civil Code § 48a. (See **Exhibit C** attached hereto).

3 30. The Defendants' response to the retraction demand was an outright refusal, not only to
4 retract the false and harmful narrative they created, but to take even the most basic steps to curb its
5 viral spread. More disturbingly, they refused to acknowledge the ongoing and compounding harm
6 inflicted on the Plaintiff, a woman whose only "crime" was suffering from a rare neurological disability
7 that the medical community itself often struggles to diagnose. On average individuals with SPS endure
8 a delay of over six years before receiving a correct diagnosis, often being misdiagnosed with other
9 disabilities. The fact that the Defendants would ignore this reality, and knowingly portray a medically
10 vulnerable woman as deceptive or mentally unstable, demonstrates a level of callousness and cruelty
11 unbecoming any journalistic or ethical standard. (See **Exhibit D** attached hereto).

13 31. This failure was not an isolated oversight—it is emblematic of a deeper, systemic
14 **breakdown in corporate governance at Paramount Global and its media subsidiaries.** At every
15 level, Defendants had the opportunity to intervene: to retract the misleading content, to verify the
16 medical evidence provided, to prevent renewed harm when the segment resurfaced, or at the very least,
17 to acknowledge the consequences of their actions. Instead, Paramount and its affiliates have
18 demonstrated a deliberate pattern of editorial irresponsibility, institutional apathy, and willful disregard
19 for the harm inflicted by their content. Their refusal to act, even when directly presented with evidence
20 of factual inaccuracy and human suffering, reflects not just negligence, but a corporate policy of evasion
21 and denial, shielding profit-driven sensationalism behind a façade of plausible deniability.

23 32. In response to Plaintiff's retraction demand, which requested **no monetary**
24 **compensation**, only the removal or correction of the segment, Defendants callously dismissed the
25 medical records she provided to Inside Edition's production team in 2010, as mere "**talking points,**"
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1 “key facts,” or “context” that *Inside Edition* was under no obligation to report. (See **Exhibit C**). That
2 chilling response wasn’t just dismissive, it was a confession. This brazen admission reveals a willful
3 disregard for truth, ethics, and basic human decency, and lays bare a **toxic corporate culture at**
4 **Paramount and its subsidiaries**—one in which editorial negligence is not only tolerated, but actively
5 excused, and the suffering of the vulnerable individuals they target is treated as collateral damage in
6 the pursuit of sensationalism and monetization.

7
8 33. Defendants’ conduct went far beyond defamation, it amounted to targeted character
9 assassination that compromised Plaintiff’s ability to obtain medical care and live with dignity,
10 effectively denying her the basic civil rights afforded to individuals with disabilities under state and
11 federal law. Under the corporate governance of Paramount Global, a publicly traded media
12 conglomerate, CBS through *Inside Edition* knowingly broadcast a distorted portrayal of Plaintiff with
13 a rare neurological disorder, callously manipulating her suffering for profit. This broadcast was not
14 only false, it was weaponized. It shaped public opinion, seeded doubt, and poisoned the judgment of
15 medical professionals who viewed the segment and, as a result, questioned the legitimacy of Plaintiff’s
16 symptoms and diagnosis. Paramount’s failure to retract the segment, even after being reminded of the
17 verifiable medical records they were presented in 2010, reflects a deeply entrenched corporate culture—
18 one that devalues truth.

19
20 34. This conduct constitutes a direct violation of the California Unruh Civil Rights Act (Cal.
21 Civ. Code § 51), which guarantees individuals with disabilities full and equal access to the services,
22 privileges, and public-facing platforms of business establishments, including media companies like
23 Paramount and its subsidiaries. By denying Plaintiff accurate media representation, by casting
24 aspersions on her credibility, and by willfully amplifying a defamatory portrayal of her disability,
25 Defendants engaged in discriminatory conduct expressly prohibited by state civil rights law. The
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1 consequences were not hypothetical, they were devastating. Plaintiff was misjudged by physicians,
2 denied timely care, and further traumatized by a media empire that knew the truth and chose to suppress
3 it. This is not just editorial negligence. It is corporate malice endorsed, maintained, and protected at the
4 highest levels of Paramount Global.

5 35. Furthermore, Defendants' conduct also violates the Americans with Disabilities Act,
6 Title III (42 U.S.C. § 12182), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in public
7 accommodations and services. Defendants' actions denied Plaintiff the full and equal enjoyment of
8 their media services by refusing to consider, acknowledge, or incorporate her medically documented
9 disability, even when directly presented with verified records. Paramount was on notice of Plaintiff's
10 disability and the real-world harm caused by their broadcast, yet refused to update or correct the
11 segment.
12

13 36. The refusal to act amounted to a denial of reasonable accommodation under Title III of
14 the ADA in the equal representation, medical credibility, and dignified treatment to which disabled
15 individuals are entitled. Paramount's deliberate editorial choices materially interfered with Plaintiff's
16 access to public life, medical treatment, and societal inclusion, harms that nondisabled individuals do
17 not face under similar circumstances. While others get the dignity of being believed, disabled
18 individuals like Plaintiff are too often treated as punchlines. It created precisely the type of stigma and
19 exclusion that the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted to prevent.
20

21 **A. ORIGINAL DEFAMATORY BROADCAST**

22 37. Upon information and belief, in or around January 2010, employees, agents, or
23 representatives acting on behalf of Inside Edition secretly filmed Plaintiff in public as she went about
24 her daily life, months after the original segments depicting the severity of her symptoms had aired. At
25 the time of this surreptitious filming, Plaintiff was under the ongoing care of a licensed neurologist and
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1 had been prescribed medication to alleviate the symptoms of her diagnosed neurological disability. This
2 context, including her medical progress and treatment, was explicitly communicated to Inside Edition’s
3 production team and supported by medical records that were provided directly to them.

4 38. Shortly after the initial filming of the segment in a shopping plaza parking lot,
5 Defendants’ journalist and production team accompanied Plaintiff to her home, where she voluntarily
6 provided Inside Edition with a copy of medical documentation confirming her diagnosis and explaining
7 the medication-related improvements in her disability. Inside Edition had everything they needed to
8 tell the truth, yet chose to knowingly mislead the public.

9
10 39. On or about February 4, 2010, *Inside Edition* aired the defamatory segment laced with
11 innuendo and insinuation, framing the piece around the claim that Plaintiff was worried they “never
12 find a cure,” then immediately pivoting to, “But INSIDE EDITION cameras found her walking
13 normally, playing with her dogs, going shopping, even getting behind the wheel of a car and driving!”

14 40. The producers admit within the segment to having “discreetly” observed Plaintiff over
15 the course of several weeks, cutting to secretly obtained footage of Plaintiff before culminating in a
16 dramatic build-up for viewers, framing a confrontation in a shopping plaza parking lot as the supposed
17 exposé of deception. Despite the insinuation that Plaintiff was feigning illness—and that correspondent
18 Les Trent was sent to confront her about “her remarkable recovery”—Plaintiff did not evade the
19 interaction, responded politely to all questions, and even offered to provide medical documentation. In
20 a gesture of full transparency, Plaintiff candidly stated she was unsure whether she was even capable
21 of driving due to her medical disability.
22

23
24 41. The segment then cuts to a report from the Centers for Disease Control citing an unnamed
25 admitting neurologist at an unidentified hospital, stating that “The admitting neurologist felt that there
26 was a strong psychogenic component” to Plaintiff’s symptoms, followed by the broadcast dramatically
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1 flashing the word “psychogenic” in large on-screen text and explaining that “psychogenic means that
2 there is a mental or psychological cause for her spasms.” Yet the producers never contacted Plaintiff’s
3 treating neurologist at the time and flatly refused to review medical records from the physician who
4 had personally examined and treated her for at least three months prior to the segment’s filming—later
5 dismissing those records as mere “talking points” they were under no obligation to report on.

6 42. Although the producers repeatedly suggested throughout the broadcast that there was
7 uncertainty surrounding Plaintiff’s medical disability, the segment itself concedes that Plaintiff
8 “showed INSIDE EDITION a report from a doctor who also believes her symptoms were vaccination-
9 induced.” Despite possessing this report, Defendants chose to disregard or downplay its contents in
10 favor of advancing a narrative centered on a speculative “psychogenic” diagnosis. This selective
11 reporting constitutes a deliberate distortion of the facts and demonstrates that Defendants had access to
12 exculpatory medical evidence yet willfully excluded it—supporting a finding of reckless disregard for
13 the truth and actual malice.
14

15 43. The segment’s content and framing omitted any reference to the months of medical
16 treatment Plaintiff had received from a treating neurologist, instead portraying her in a false light,
17 suggesting she was either fabricating a serious medical disability or suffering from mental instability.
18 This was done despite being in possession of medical documentation that directly explained the
19 improvements in Plaintiff’s disability, evidence that would have completely undermined the narrative
20 Defendants chose to broadcast. Rather than present a truthful or balanced report, Inside Edition
21 deliberately suppressed Plaintiff’s medical records, and through a calculated editorial decision,
22 produced a sensationalized hit piece knowingly misleading the public. **Their goal was not to inform,**
23 **but to provoke outrage,** generate virality, and profit from the public humiliation of a disabled woman,
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1 depriving her of the civil rights and dignity to which she is entitled. This was not journalism. It was
2 exploitation masquerading as news.

3 **B. DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION IN REPORTING - VIOLATIONS OF THE**
4 **CALIFORNIA UNRUH CIVIL RIGHTS ACT AND THE AMERICANS WITH**
5 **DISABILITIES ACT**

6 44. Defendants' conduct constitutes unlawful discrimination under the Americans with
7 Disabilities Act (ADA), 42 U.S.C. § 12182 et seq., and California's Unruh Civil Rights Act, Cal. Civ.
8 Code § 51. Through their Inside Edition broadcast, Paramount Global denied Plaintiff the full and equal
9 benefit of accurate and respectful media coverage by falsely implying her medically documented
10 neurological disability was fabricated or the result of mental instability. This portrayal ignored verified
11 medical records provided to Defendants both before and after Plaintiff's successful treatment, and
12 instead advanced a narrative that perpetuates harmful stereotypes about individuals with invisible
13 disabilities.

14 45. Rather than make reasonable efforts to include the truth or correct their coverage,
15 Defendants selectively omitted critical clinical information, framed Plaintiff as delusional or deceptive,
16 and continued to circulate the segment despite knowing it was defamatory. Their refusal to issue a
17 clarification or retraction—even after being informed of the resulting harassment, reputational
18 harm, and threats to Plaintiff's safety—demonstrates willful disregard for Plaintiff's rights and a
19 failure to reasonably accommodate or rectify their discriminatory and defamatory conduct. Their quiet
20 removal of the video segment from digital platforms further underscores their recognition that the
21 broadcast was foreseeably harmful and legally indefensible.
22

23 46. Defendants cannot cloak their conduct under the First Amendment while willfully
24 distorting the private medical condition of a private individual. Characterizing Plaintiff's verified
25 medical records as mere "talking points," as Defendants' counsel did, evidences actual malice and
26 reckless disregard for the truth. Defendants' actions opened the door to sustained online abuse and
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emboldened third parties—including a high-profile celebrity defendant—to weaponize their defamatory broadcast in a retaliatory restraining order proceeding rooted in the same false narrative. The cumulative harm is not only reputational and emotional but also legal and civic in nature, denying Plaintiff equal dignity, safety, and protection under federal and state disability laws.

C. 2024–2025 VIRAL REPUBLICATION: RENEWED HARM & LIABILITY

“This video does not appear on our digital platforms. It is unfortunate that you have been subjected to hateful comments, but we do not have the ability to police the behavior of people on online platforms we do not control.”

- Bettina Cataldi, Senior Manager of Publicity,
CBS Media Ventures, April 17, 2025

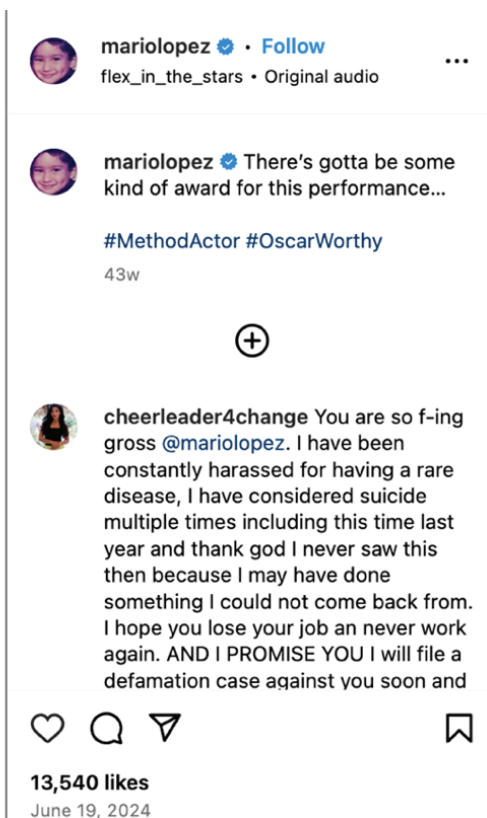
47. At the time of the original broadcast by Inside Edition on or about February 4, 2010, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok did not yet exist. Upon information and belief, the segment was not posted, distributed, or otherwise made available by Defendants on those platforms at the time of its initial airing.

48. Upon information and belief, Paramount Global is the lawful owner of all copyrights held by CBS Broadcasting Inc., including those of its affiliates and subsidiaries. This ownership extends to all content and productions created by Inside Edition Inc. and aired on the *Inside Edition* program.

49. Paramount Global’s Form 10-K filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024, characterizes itself as “fundamentally a content company,” emphasizing that “copyright and other intellectual property laws that protect our content and related intellectual property are extremely important to us,” <https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0000813828/000081382825000005/para-20241231.htm> (last visited May 4, 2025). This admission underscores that Paramount’s core value lies

in the control and protection of its content, making a refusal to issue takedown notices or enforce its copyrights when their defamatory or harmful content resurfaces a conscious, strategic decision.

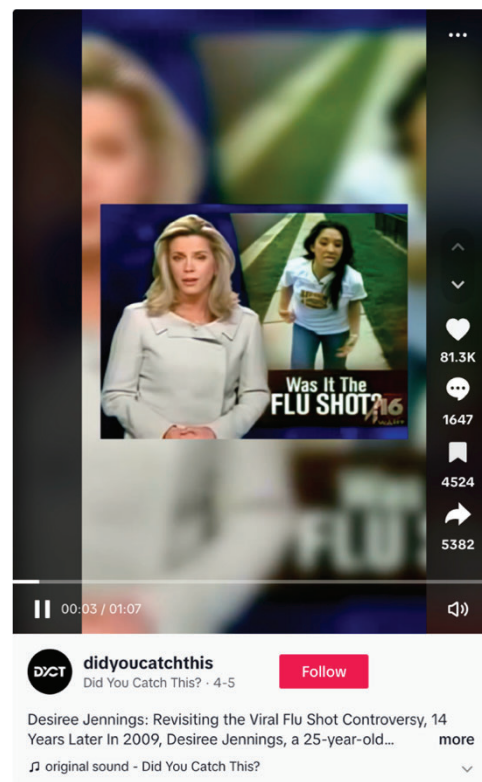
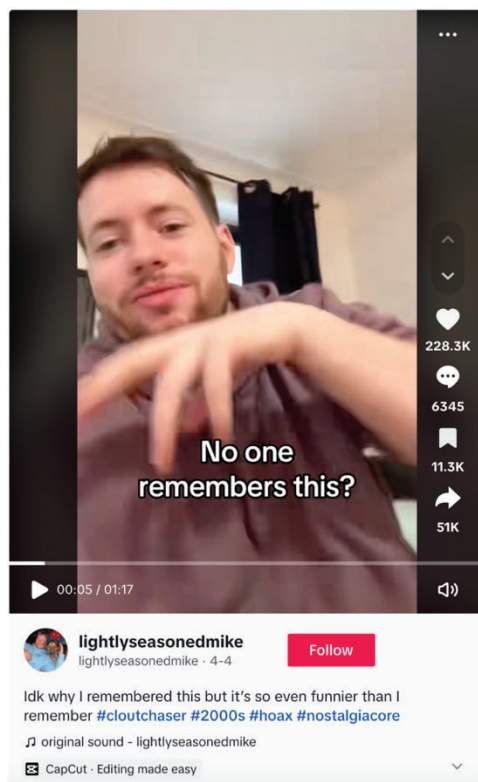
43. On or about March 10, 2025, Plaintiff discovered that, on or about June 19, 2024, actor and *Access Hollywood* host, Mario Lopez, recklessly republished Defendants' defamatory and copyright protected broadcast by sharing it to a new distribution platform, Instagram. Lopez's verified Instagram account maintains an audience of approximately 3.2 million followers, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C8Zx0QdpG9c> (last visited May 4, 2025). Lopez's post echoed and amplified the same false and damaging narrative originally disseminated by Defendants. The video quickly gained traction, garnering over 1 million views, 15,000 likes, and nearly 1,000 comments, which triggered a wave of public ridicule and reputational harm to Plaintiff in 2024.



44. On or about April 4 and 5, 2025, less than a month after Plaintiff confronted Mario Lopez on Instagram regarding the republication of the Defendants' defamatory broadcast, two TikTok

accounts, @lightlyseasonedmike (<https://www.tiktok.com/@lightlyseasonedmike>) and @dideyoucatchthis (<https://www.tiktok.com/@dideyoucatchthis>), republished the same defamatory content. One of the accounts reiterated the false narrative originally manufactured by Defendants, going so far as to mock Plaintiff's neurological disability, imitate her symptoms for entertainment, and publicly label her a "clout chaser" and a "hoax." These defamatory statements directly cited and relied upon Defendants' Inside Edition broadcast as purported "evidence," thereby reigniting and compounding the reputational harm first caused by Defendants' original publication and perpetuated through this republication.

45. As of May 4, 2025, two TikTok videos consisting largely of the February 4, 2010 Inside Edition segment had collectively garnered approximately 4.4 million views, 300,000 likes, and nearly 8,000 comments and counting, further amplifying the reputational harm and public ridicule faced by Plaintiff, <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT2oJ14MG/> and <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT2otJLVA/> (last visited May 4, 2025).



1 46. On or about April 10, 2025, and after enduring nearly a week of thousands of hateful,
2 derogatory, and demeaning comments on TikTok, Plaintiff conducted a Google search using her former
3 name, Desiree Jennings, in an attempt to locate the source of the resurfaced video broadcast. During
4 this search, Plaintiff discovered that a press release associated with the original Inside Edition segment
5 remained publicly accessible on Paramount's CBS Media Ventures website. The press release, which
6 appeared to endorse and promote the defamatory content, was available at the following URL:
7 [https://www.paramountpressexpress.com/cbs-media-ventures/shows/inside-
9 edition/releases/?view=24173](https://www.paramountpressexpress.com/cbs-media-ventures/shows/inside-
8 edition/releases/?view=24173).

10 47. On or about April 10, 2025, Plaintiff sent an email to three employees affiliated with
11 CBS, Paramount, and Viacom CBS, listed as media contacts for the Inside Edition show on the
12 Paramount/CBS Media Ventures corporate website. In the email, Plaintiff requested the removal of the
13 press release associated with the original broadcast. She explained that, at the time of filming, she had
14 provided the production team with medical documentation confirming she was undergoing treatment
15 for her symptoms. She further detailed the ongoing harm the press release was causing and requested
16 its removal from public view to prevent further reputational and emotional damage.
17

18 48. On or about April 14, 2025, Bettina Cataldi, Senior Manager of Publicity for CBS,
19 responded to Plaintiff's email stating that CBS "stand[s] by the accuracy of our report," but nonetheless
20 agreed to remove the press release from the Paramount/CBS Media Ventures website.

21 49. Despite the removal of the press release, the wave of online harassment did not subside.
22 In response, on or about April 16, 2025, the Plaintiff emailed Ms. Cataldi again, requesting to be
23 connected with a journalist or representative from CBS or one of its affiliated news organizations to
24 help correct the public record. In her message, Plaintiff emphasized that it was unacceptable to endure
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1 16 years of public abuse and be told by strangers to “die” simply because she suffers from a neurological
2 disease.

3 50. On or about April 17, 2025, Plaintiff received a response from Ms. Cataldi containing a
4 critical admission—one that, for the first time, **revealed that the February 4, 2010 broadcast at the**
5 **center of this case had been materially altered.** Cataldi stated, “This video does not appear on our
6 digital platforms. It is unfortunate that you have been subjected to hateful comments, but we do not
7 have the ability to police the behavior of people on online platforms we do not control.” Until this
8 moment, Plaintiff had no knowledge that the original defamatory segment had been materially modified
9 since its first publication. This revelation constituted Plaintiff’s first notice of a material change to the
10 publication marking a significant moment in the timeline of harm.
11

12 51. On or about April 17, 2025, Plaintiff responded, indicating her intent to submit a formal
13 demand for retraction pursuant to California Civil Code § 48a. In her response, Plaintiff emphasized
14 that despite the video’s removal from CBS’s digital platforms, “it remains accessible on third-party
15 social media platforms with strict copyright enforcement procedures raising a reasonable inference that
16 CBS and/or its affiliates are not only aware of its continued existence, but may be tacitly permitting it
17 to persist.”
18

19 52. On or about April 18, 2025, Plaintiff served Defendants with a formal retraction demand
20 pursuant to California Civil Code § 48a, requesting a full retraction and the publication of a correction
21 explicitly stating that Plaintiff was under active medical care for a neurological disability and was being
22 treated with prescribed medication at the time of the original broadcast. The demand also called on
23 Defendants to take reasonable steps to remove the segment’s republication from third-party social
24 media platforms that maintain copyright enforcement procedures and takedown protocols. (See **Exhibit**
25 **C**).
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1 **53.** On or about April 25, 2025, Defendants’ outside litigation counsel, Jean-Paul Jassy of
2 Jassy Vick Carolan LLP, responded on behalf of CBS Media Ventures and Inside Edition, flatly
3 refusing to issue a retraction in response to Plaintiff’s formal demand. (*See Exhibit D*). In a dismissive
4 and legally inconsistent reply, Defendants claimed that the statute of limitations for any claim “expired
5 well over a decade ago”—entirely ignoring Plaintiff’s recent and first-time discovery of material
6 modifications to the publication, as admitted by the Defendants themselves. **These modifications**
7 **included the removal of the video from CBS’s digital platforms, the deletion of the associated**
8 **press release, and the continued allowance of Defendants’ copyright-protected content to new**
9 **audiences across social media platforms.**

10
11 **54.** Defendants restarted the timeline for liability under the republication doctrine yet seek to
12 avoid responsibility by relying on the original 2010 air date. In short, they admittedly materially altered
13 and allowed the republication of the original segment, while claiming the protection of its original form
14 and date. This is made all the more troubling by Paramount Global’s own Form 10-K filing for the
15 fiscal year ending December 31, 2024, in which it publicly declares that **“copyright and other**
16 **intellectual property laws that protect our content and related intellectual property are extremely**
17 **important to us.”** (See ¶ 14). That promise, it appears, applies only when convenient for Paramount’s
18 corporate interests, not when its content is harming private citizens. Paramount cannot both claim the
19 sanctity of its intellectual property to investors while turning a blind eye to the viral circulation of its
20 own content when it causes real-world harm to individuals, especially those with disabilities.

21
22 **55.** The Plaintiff has lived as a private individual, deliberately avoiding the public eye, except
23 for two brief, involuntary moments: first, when Defendants dragged her into national ridicule through
24 their defamatory 2010 broadcast, and again in 2023, as part of a piece by NBC News following the
25 death of controversial figure Dr. Rashid Buttar. At no point did Plaintiff seek fame, media attention, or
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1 public notoriety. Yet through no fault of her own, she is now once again being forcibly thrust into the
2 spotlight, this time as the subject of widespread online abuse, cruel mockery, and even death threats.
3 She is not being treated as a person, but as viral fodder, a spectacle engineered by Defendants and
4 sustained by their ongoing refusal to correct the record. This renewed public harassment is not the result
5 of Plaintiff's conduct, but the direct and foreseeable consequence of Defendants' reckless editorial
6 choices and malicious inaction.

7
8 56. Defendants' conduct implicates not only civil liability, but also raises serious concerns
9 under the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, which requires that the Federal Communications
10 Commission (FCC) approve broadcast license transfers only when they serve "the public interest,
11 convenience, and necessity." (See 47 U.S.C. § 310(d)). Paramount Global, as the parent company of
12 CBS Broadcasting Inc. and Inside Edition Inc., is a federally licensed broadcaster entrusted with the
13 use of public airwaves. By knowingly distorting the medical illness of a disabled woman, refusing to
14 correct a defamatory narrative, and allowing harmful, outdated content to re-circulate on digital
15 platforms, **Paramount has abused its platform and demonstrated a pattern of editorial and**
16 **corporate misconduct that directly undermines its obligation to the public under federal law.** The
17 pending merger between Paramount and Skydance Media is now subject to FCC review, and Plaintiff's
18 experience exemplifies how unchecked media power can be weaponized to harm the very citizens these
19 licenses are intended to serve.
20

21 **D. BEYOND THE BROADCAST: A LIFE OF MERIT AND MEANING**

22
23 57. Defendants painted Plaintiff as nothing more than an attention-seeking, mentally unstable
24 cheerleader, a caricature crafted for shock value and viral appeal. In reality, Plaintiff is a resilient,
25 intelligent, and accomplished woman whose life's work, integrity, and dignity were callously trampled
26 by a narrative designed to entertain at her expense.
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1 58. Plaintiff Townsend currently works as a litigation and intellectual property paralegal for
2 law firms based in the Los Angeles area. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry and
3 Molecular Biology from the University of California, Irvine (UCI), where she also conducted scientific
4 research in the Gershon Laboratory, assisting in the analysis of mass spectrometry data related to the
5 molecular structure of the vaccinia virus. Her STEM background qualifies her to sit for the United
6 States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) registration exam to become a licensed patent
7 practitioner.
8

9 59. In the fall of 2024, Plaintiff spent several months in Washington, D.C., advocating for
10 expanded access to legal services for underserved individuals and small businesses, as well as for the
11 restoration of the trademark logo of former Washington Redskins figure Chief Two Guns White Calf.
12 She lobbied members of Congress, including those on the Senate and House Judiciary Subcommittees
13 on Intellectual Property, urging the creation of a federal registration system for non-attorney trademark
14 practitioners. Modeled after the Patent Office's existing process for licensing patent agents, this
15 proposed reform would significantly reduce the cost barrier to federal trademark protection by allowing
16 qualified individuals to represent clients before the USPTO without a law degree. A 32-page draft of
17 the proposed legislation, titled *The Chief Two Guns White Calf Trademark Integrity Act of 2025*, is
18 currently under review by Congressman Lance Gooden of Texas and his legislative team.
19

20 60. After years of immune-suppressive therapy and intensive lifestyle modifications to
21 manage her disability, Plaintiff's symptoms eventually stabilized, allowing her to reenter the workforce
22 full-time. Her first full-time position was as an intellectual property legal assistant at Outpace Bio, Inc.,
23 a biotechnology company headquartered in Seattle, Washington. There, she contributed to the
24 development and management of the company's intellectual property portfolio, including pending and
25 issued patents involving chimeric antigen receptor T-cell (CAR-T) technology. Despite receiving a
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1 stellar performance review, Plaintiff's employment was abruptly and prematurely terminated just days
2 later, after her employer discovered the defamatory narrative about her that had been widely circulated
3 online by Defendants.

4 61. The ongoing circulation of Defendants' defamatory broadcast continues to inflict
5 tangible harm on Plaintiff's career prospects. In January 2024, Plaintiff interviewed with senior staff at
6 the prominent law firm McDermott Will & Emery for a paralegal position. The interviews appeared to
7 go well, with positive engagement and follow-up questions from multiple members of the hiring team.
8 However, shortly after the final round of meetings, and following what Plaintiff reasonably believes
9 was a routine Google search of her name, all communication from the firm abruptly ceased. No
10 explanation was provided, and repeated attempts to follow up were ignored.
11

12 62. A similar incident occurred in January of 2024 during an interview process with the legal
13 department at Warner Bros. Discovery. In that case, Plaintiff proactively disclosed her past experience
14 with viral media coverage and explained the defamatory nature of the segment during a candid
15 conversation with the team. Despite receiving what appeared to be a warm and receptive response
16 during the interview, she was again met with silence, no return communications, no rejection, and no
17 further engagement. These patterns strongly indicate that the continued presence of Defendants'
18 misleading and defamatory content online is serving as a silent but devastating professional barrier,
19 undermining Plaintiff's hard-earned credibility and cutting off career opportunities for which she is
20 objectively qualified.
21

22 63. Prior to the Defendants' defamatory broadcast in 2010, Plaintiff was employed as a
23 Marketing Communications Manager, where she developed scripting and authored internal content for
24 the technical phone queues at AOL. Previously she worked within AOL's Public Relations and
25 Communications Department on internal and external messaging initiatives, contributing to the
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1 company's corporate communication strategy. During the summer of 2009, Plaintiff was selected to
2 serve as a Washington Redskins Cheerleader Ambassador, representing the team at official events and
3 community engagements.

4 64. Plaintiff previously served as a registered securities representative at Morgan Stanley,
5 one of the largest global investment firms. She held multiple advanced financial licenses, including
6 Series 7, Series 66, and Series 31, authorizing her to advise clients and execute trades in securities,
7 futures, options, and commodities. These credentials reflect a high level of financial acumen,
8 professional trust, and regulatory clearance—further underscoring the reputational damage caused by
9 Defendants' defamatory actions.
10

11 65. As a direct and foreseeable consequence of Defendants' defamatory broadcast, Plaintiff's
12 ability to pursue a career in public service, specifically, her intention to run for Mayor of Los Angeles
13 in the 2026 municipal election, has been severely impaired. The broadcast falsely mischaracterized
14 Plaintiff's diagnosed neurological disability as fabricated, thereby creating the misleading impression
15 that she was either mentally unstable or malingering. This implication casts serious doubt on Plaintiff's
16 credibility, trustworthiness, and fitness for public office. As a result, the enduring stigma attached to
17 Defendants' false portrayal poses a substantial and ongoing barrier to Plaintiff's electoral viability and
18 has inflicted lasting reputational, professional, and civic harm.
19

20 66. Despite Plaintiff's extensive professional background, including work in intellectual
21 property law, biotechnology, financial services, and federal legislative reform, Defendants' defamatory
22 broadcast has cast a long, unrelenting shadow over her career. The viral, false narrative portraying her
23 as mentally unstable has systematically undermined her credibility, derailed promising job prospects,
24 and left her vulnerable to abrupt employment loss even after positive performance reviews. Prestigious
25 law firms and legal departments that once welcomed her candidacy with enthusiasm have cut off
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1 contact after online searches revealed Defendants’ broadcast. Employers have quietly passed judgment
2 on the basis of misinformation, without ever allowing Plaintiff the chance to explain the truth. The
3 defamatory segment continues to circulate in digital spaces, infecting search results and sabotaging her
4 livelihood in ways that a correction or retraction could have mitigated. Instead, Defendants have chosen
5 inaction, ensuring that the false narrative they created remains the loudest voice in the room whenever
6 Plaintiff’s name is spoken in professional circles.

7
8 **E. PARAMOUNT’S TOXIC CULTURE: A LIABILITY TO SHAREHOLDERS**

9 **“Please understand that if you bring any claim against Inside Edition, its affiliates or employees,**
10 **we will respond vigorously, including by bringing an anti-SLAPP motion under California Code**
11 **of Civil Procedure § 425.16. If we prevail on such a motion—and we are confident that we**
12 **would—then you would be required to reimburse Inside Edition for all attorneys’ fees and**
13 **costs.”**

14 - Jean-Paul Jassy, Litigation Counsel to CBS Media Ventures/Inside
Edition in response to the Plaintiff, April 25, 2025

15 67. After weaponizing their media platform to defame and humiliate private individuals,
16 Paramount Global and CBS further compound the harm by weaponizing their legal departments to deter
17 accountability. In response to Plaintiff’s formal retraction demand, **one that sought no monetary**
18 **damages, only correction of the record**, Defendants responded not with empathy or responsibility,
19 but with a threat. CBS’s litigation counsel warned that any legal action would be met with an aggressive
20 anti-SLAPP motion and a demand for attorneys’ fees, a tactic designed not to defend journalistic truth,
21 but to financially intimidate and bury a disabled *pro se* plaintiff in procedural warfare. This chilling
22 response reflects a broader corporate strategy: exploit vulnerable individuals for content, then use deep-
23 pocketed legal firepower to evade consequences. Rather than demonstrate editorial integrity or ethical
24 concern, Paramount and CBS have institutionalized a culture of reputational harm and post-hoc legal
25 intimidation, one where silence is coerced not by merit, but by money.
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**F. INSIDE EDITION’S HISTORY OF DEFAMATORY REPORTING:
JAMES FRANCO**

68. Paramount’s production and distribution of *Inside Edition* has, on numerous occasions, demonstrated a **pattern of reckless disregard for the truth** in its coverage of both public and private individuals, resulting in significant reputational harm. This pattern is not unique to Plaintiff’s experience. A particularly egregious example involved actor and director James Franco, a close friend of the Plaintiff, whose professional and personal reputation was also severely impacted by *Inside Edition*’s defamatory and sensationalized reporting.



69. On or about January 22, 2018, Inside Edition aired a segment titled “3 James Franco Accusers Share Allegations About Actor: ‘I’m Terrified for My Career’⁵.” The segment employed a nearly identical editorial “playbook” used against Plaintiff eight years earlier, designed to irreparably damage Mr. Franco’s public image and career. The report relied heavily on contextually misleading or unverified allegations made by three actresses Violet Paley, Sarah Tither-Kaplan, and Tatjana Liepelt — who, despite claiming to be “terrified” for their careers, are seen laughing and smiling throughout

⁵ The Inside Edition segment employing the same defamatory playbook used against Plaintiff can be accessed at: <https://www.insideedition.com/3-james-franco-accusers-share-allegations-about-actor-im-terrified-my-career-40027>.

1 the broadcast, undermining the seriousness of their claims and casting doubt on the piece's credibility.
2 Notably, Liepelt referred to James Franco as a "good actor," an ironic observation coming from one of
3 three individuals who are themselves professional actors, casting further doubt on the authenticity of
4 the segment and raising serious questions about whether their performance was scripted, rehearsed, or
5 editorially manipulated to appear credible.

6 70. The claims made by the three women include the following:

7 **Violet Paley:**

8 Upon information and belief, Violet Paley, a woman who has publicly disclosed a
9 diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, accused Mr. Franco, during the broadcast,
10 of coercing her into a "sex act." Notably, in that same segment, just four months prior to
11 the release of her memoir *Frozen Oranges*⁶ on May 2, 2018, she admitted, in her own
12 words, "I could have said no." The timing of her accusation in proximity to the memoir's
13 release, combined with her contradictory statement, raises substantial doubts as to the
14 credibility of her claims and suggests potential ulterior motives tied to publicity and
15 personal promotion. Despite this, Inside Edition chose to air the segment, portraying her
16 allegations as credible and unchallenged, thereby contributing to the defamatory
17 narrative against Mr. Franco. This same editorial recklessness and willingness to
18 platform questionable claims without scrutiny reflects the very pattern of conduct that
19 harmed Plaintiff, wherein Defendants elevated salacious narratives over verified facts,
20 disregarded medical records, and abandoned any duty of care, causing Plaintiff enduring
21 reputational, emotional, and professional damage.
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27 ⁶ Violet Paley's memoir, *Frozen Oranges*, was available for purchase on Amazon as early as May 2018. See *Frozen Oranges*, Violet Paley, available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1717467873>.

Tatjana Liepelt:

Upon information and belief, Tatjana Liepelt served as Mr. Franco’s personal assistant from 2011 to 2013. She publicly shared unverified text messages allegedly from Mr. Franco, in which he used what she described as “abusive” language, including asking if she was “retarded.” Despite characterizing this language as abusive, Liepelt continues to list her employment under Mr. Franco on her LinkedIn profile⁷, stating she was “fortunate” to have worked with such creative individuals and touting her role as his personal assistant to prospective employers. The stark contrast between her claims of mistreatment and her ongoing professional endorsement raises substantial doubts about the veracity and motive behind her allegations. Nevertheless, Inside Edition aired the segment without presenting any corroborating evidence or addressing these credibility issues, demonstrating once again a pattern of promoting salacious, unvetted claims for dramatic effect. This same editorial strategy was weaponized against Plaintiff, whose medically substantiated recovery and normal walking, while under appropriate treatment, was deceptively framed as proof of malingering or deceit. In both cases, Defendants ignored context, disregarded factual nuance, and amplified misleading narratives to manufacture sensationalism at the expense of truth and fairness.

Sarah Tither-Kaplan:

Upon information and belief, Sarah Tither-Kaplan publicly claimed she was “terrified” for her career due to alleged creative differences with James Franco. Yet despite this assertion, she continues—to this day—to prominently feature multiple scenes alongside

⁷ Upon information and belief, what appears to be Tatjana Liepelt’s professional LinkedIn profile is publicly available at the following URL: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tatjana-liepelt-457807b9/>.

1 Franco in her IMDb acting reel⁸. Notably, Defendants even reinforced the credibility of
2 her claim by including the quote “I’m Terrified for My Career” in the title of the broadcast
3 segment itself. A news organization adhering to basic principles of journalistic integrity
4 would have performed reasonable due diligence and called attention to such
5 inconsistencies. This same failure to verify facts or provide balanced context was
6 repeated in Plaintiff’s case, where Inside Edition leaned heavily on an impersonal,
7 generalized CDC report to cast doubt on Plaintiff’s diagnosis—while wholly ignoring
8 detailed, contemporaneous records from her treating physician of several months. In
9 doing so, Defendants not only misled the public but actively undermined credible
10 medical evidence in favor of sensationalized conjecture, further compounding the
11 defamatory impact of the broadcast.
12

13 **G. NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION, HIRING, AND RETENTION: DEFENDANTS’**
14 **FAILURE TO PREVENT HARM TO PLAINTIFF, JAMES FRANCO & OTHER**
15 **VICTIMS OF DEFENDANTS’ EDITORIAL MISCONDUCT**

16 71. Upon information and belief, Deborah Norville was prominently featured in both
17 defamatory broadcast segments that mischaracterized Plaintiff’s medically diagnosed neurological
18 disability and later maliciously attacked actor and director James Franco. In Plaintiff’s case, Norville
19 lent credibility and authority to a false and stigmatizing portrayal, reinforcing a narrative that
20 questioned the legitimacy of a documented medical disability. Despite the severe reputational harm
21 caused, Defendants took no corrective action and instead retained Norville in a position of editorial
22 influence. Years later, Norville again served as a central figure in a similarly damaging segment against
23 Mr. Franco, contributing to a broadcast that played a substantial role in dismantling his Hollywood
24 career. Defendants’ continued promotion of Norville, despite her role in disseminating demonstrably
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26
27 ⁸Sarah Tither-Kaplan’s IMDb profile, which features an acting reel including scenes with James Franco, is available at
28 <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5722426/>.

1 harmful content against both a private and public figure, reflects a pattern of reckless editorial decision-
2 making and an institutional disregard for accountability, ethics, or the foreseeable harm their broadcasts
3 would cause.

4 72. Upon information and belief, Inside Edition has been under the editorial control of
5 Executive Producer Charles Lachman since its inception in 1989. During his nearly 40-year tenure, the
6 platform has consistently prioritized sensationalism over journalistic integrity, routinely exploiting and
7 defaming individuals—both high-profile and private—for ratings. The defamatory segments targeting
8 Plaintiff and Mr. Franco exemplify Lachman’s editorial pattern: context is stripped, nuance is ignored,
9 and unverified or distorted allegations are aired for maximum impact. Under his leadership, Inside
10 Edition has cultivated a culture where inflammatory and misleading narratives are not only tolerated
11 but encouraged, even when such content results in long-term reputational, emotional, and professional
12 harm.
13

14 73. Despite this well-documented editorial history, Paramount Global and CBS Media
15 Ventures have **continued to retain Charles Lachman in his executive capacity, enabling him to**
16 **operate with near-total impunity.** The decision to keep Lachman and Norville in senior roles, even
17 after both were implicated in broadcasts that severely harmed Plaintiff and Mr. Franco, demonstrates a
18 systemic failure in hiring, supervision, and retention. Paramount’s inaction in the face of foreseeable
19 and repeated misconduct reflects a corporate culture that rewards ratings over responsibility. Plaintiff
20 alleges that this entrenched institutional negligence directly contributed to the production and
21 dissemination of defamatory content and further underscores Defendants’ indifference to the
22 reputational and personal destruction of those wrongfully targeted by Inside Edition’s reckless
23 reporting. Plaintiff alleges that this long-term, institutional negligence materially contributed to the
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28

1 defamatory broadcasts that harmed both Plaintiff and Mr. Franco, and reflects a corporate culture
2 indifferent to journalistic ethics, truth, or the reputational destruction of innocent parties.

3 **H. PARAMOUNT GLOBAL’S PATTERN OF DEFAMATORY CONDUCT:**
4 **PLAINTIFF AND JAMES FRANCO ARE NOT OUTLIERS**

5 74. Paramount Global and its subsidiary CBS were recently co-defendants in a high-profile
6 federal lawsuit filed by President Donald J. Trump and Representative Ronny Jackson in the Northern
7 District of Texas. The complaint alleged that CBS manipulated and deceptively edited a televised
8 interview with Vice President Kamala Harris during the 2024 presidential election in order to mislead
9 millions of viewers and tilt coverage in favor of a political opponent, all for commercial and political
10 gain. The lawsuit asserted violations of the Lanham Act and Texas deceptive trade practices laws,
11 specifically citing CBS’s calculated “slice-and-dice” editing tactics, its refusal to release the full
12 interview footage, and a chronic lack of editorial transparency. That case has since been reportedly
13 settled for \$16 million. Far from an isolated incident, this now-settled lawsuit underscores a persistent
14 pattern of unethical editorial conduct and corporate governance failure at Paramount.
15

16 75. In 2025, CBS and Paramount Global quietly settled a lawsuit brought by a former script
17 coordinator for the television series SEAL Team. The plaintiff alleged defamation and wrongful
18 termination after raising internal concerns about workplace misconduct. The lawsuit accused the
19 companies of retaliatory conduct and damaging the Plaintiff’s professional reputation. Though the
20 terms of the settlement were not publicly disclosed, the matter reflects a recurring pattern at Paramount
21 and CBS, wherein employees or contributors who challenge unethical behavior face reputational harm
22 and career setbacks, followed by eventual legal resolution behind closed doors. The case underscores
23 ongoing corporate governance failures and risk exposure stemming from Paramount’s unwillingness to
24 correct internal misconduct or protect individuals from reputational damage.
25
26
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1 76. In another high-profile example of CBS's disregard for truth and reputational harm, the
2 network became the target of a \$750 million defamation lawsuit filed by Burke Ramsey, the brother of
3 JonBenét Ramsey, in 2016. The lawsuit arose from a CBS docuseries that falsely suggested Burke had
4 been responsible for his sister's death, a sensational and speculative claim presented under the guise of
5 journalism. Rather than correcting or retracting the defamatory insinuations, CBS defended the
6 broadcast until ultimately settling the case in 2019. The Ramsey lawsuit reflects a familiar pattern:
7 CBS's willingness to exploit deeply personal tragedies for ratings, while ignoring the devastating
8 consequences for the individuals they target. Paramount and its subsidiaries have repeatedly
9 demonstrated that corporate gain takes priority over ethical reporting, due diligence, or accountability.

10
11 77. Plaintiff brings this lawsuit, filed *pro se*, not only to seek justice for herself, but to serve
12 as a beacon of hope for others who have been publicly defamed, discarded, and ignored. In a legal
13 system too often governed by wealth, influence, and media intimidation, this action challenges the
14 coordinated misuse of broadcast platforms to silence dissent and discredit the vulnerable. It is brought
15 not solely in pursuit of accountability, but in recognition of the many whose stories remain unheard—
16 those whose reputations were quietly erased without a single advocate. Plaintiff also brings this action
17 in solidarity with her friend, James Franco, who, like herself, was cast aside and abandoned by those
18 closest to him: family, friends, colleagues, and entire communities who chose complicity over truth,
19 and loyalty to a machine that wrote their paychecks over standing for what was right. This lawsuit
20 stands as a reminder to him, and to all who have endured similar abandonment, that he was never alone.

21
22
23 **FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF**
24 **(Defamation/Defamation Per Se)**
25 **Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants**

26 78. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each
27 and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

1 79. Ms. Townsend is a private figure.

2 80. As alleged hereinabove, Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and
3 Inside Edition Inc., through their agents and employees, including producers, editors, and legal counsel,
4 published, caused the publication of, participated in the publication of, and/or reasonably should have
5 foreseen that their conduct would result in the publication and viral dissemination of materially false
6 and defamatory statements of fact about Plaintiff.

7 81. Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside Edition Inc., through
8 their agents and employees, intentionally made false statements of fact and published content that
9 conveyed a false and defamatory meaning about Plaintiff. The statements broadcast and disseminated
10 by Defendants, through their program *Inside Edition*, are reasonably understood to state and imply that
11 Plaintiff was mentally unstable, dishonest, and seeking public attention under false pretenses.
12 Defendants' broadcast further implied that Plaintiff fabricated or exaggerated a medical disability,
13 misrepresented her character, and was unworthy of public trust or professional credibility, all of which
14 were false and made with actual malice or reckless disregard for the truth.

15 82. As a reasonably foreseeable, and in fact intended, consequence of Defendants' actions,
16 third parties repeated, reposted, and amplified these false and defamatory statements across various
17 media platforms, causing ongoing and compounding harm to Plaintiff's reputation, livelihood, and
18 well-being.

19 83. The defamatory nature of Defendants' video segment is apparent on its face. The
20 segment, produced and published by Inside Edition, utilized misleading narration, selective editing,
21 and sensationalized framing to convey false and defamatory impressions about Plaintiff, including that
22 she was mentally unstable, dishonest, and seeking attention under false pretenses. These false
23 statements and implications were presented as factual and were intended to subject Plaintiff to public
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1 ridicule and reputational harm. Upon information and belief, and as acknowledged by Defendants, the
2 video segment has since been removed from Defendants' platforms, an implicit admission of its
3 defamatory content and the harm it caused Plaintiff.

4 84. The defamatory nature of Defendants' false and implied statements of fact is evident on
5 the face of the publication itself, which, by deliberately omitting critical medical records and context,
6 conveyed the false and defamatory implication that Plaintiff either fabricated her illness or was mentally
7 unstable. This implication was not only false, but presented in a manner intended to ridicule and
8 discredit Plaintiff in the eyes of the public. The following excerpts from Defendants' online article
9 illustrate the defamatory framing:
10

By Inside Edition

Updated: 12:00 AM PST, February 4, 2010

First Published: 4:00 PM PST, February 3, 2010



Desiree Jennings is the woman who claimed she developed dystonia after receiving a seasonal flu shot, but INSIDE EDITION has observed her walking normally, playing with her dogs, and even driving! Is she cured? INSIDE EDITION investigates.

Her story created a national uproar. Desiree Jennings, an ambassador for the Washington Redskins cheerleading squad, claimed she developed a rare neurological disorder called dystonia after receiving a seasonal flu shot, causing dramatic spasms and slurred speech.

What made the story so startling is that her symptoms seemed to disappear when she walked backwards or ran.

Back in October 2009, Jennings and her husband told INSIDE EDITION's Les Trent they worried they'd never find a cure. But INSIDE EDITION cameras found her walking normally, playing with her dogs, going shopping, even getting behind the wheel of a car and driving!

SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF

(False Light Invasion of Privacy – California Const., Art. I, § 1)

Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants

23 85. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each
24 and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

26 86. As alleged hereinabove, Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and
27 Inside Edition Inc. publicly disclosed false and misleading information about Plaintiff's medical
28

1 disability, personal history, and moral character, portraying her in a false light that was highly offensive
2 to a reasonable person and designed to provoke public ridicule, humiliation, and distrust.

3 87. The false light created by Defendants' disclosures would be highly offensive and
4 objectionable to a reasonable person in Plaintiff's position, as it cast Plaintiff as mentally unstable and
5 deceitful, making her the object of public scorn, ridicule, humiliation, and undeserved pity.

6 88. Defendants knew, or acted with reckless disregard as to whether, their public disclosures
7 would create a false and misleading impression about Plaintiff, namely, that she was mentally unstable,
8 dishonest, or fabricating her medical disability, and nevertheless proceeded with publication in
9 conscious disregard of the truth.
10

11 89. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' false, misleading, and highly publicized
12 disclosures, Plaintiff has sustained significant harm to her career, business opportunities, and personal
13 reputation. Plaintiff has suffered, and continues to suffer, severe emotional distress, including anxiety,
14 humiliation, and social isolation, stemming from the sudden and damaging shift in public perception
15 caused by the Defendants' conduct. Furthermore, Defendants' actions have resulted in loss of income,
16 interference with professional relationships, and the disruption of future earning potential across
17 multiple sectors of Plaintiff's work and advocacy.
18

19 90. The conduct of Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside Edition
20 Inc., as described herein, was a substantial factor in causing Plaintiff serious harm, constituted a grave
21 invasion of her right to privacy, and represented an egregious breach of accepted societal norms,
22 conduct so extreme and outrageous that it shocks the conscience. Defendants acted with oppression,
23 fraud, and malice in broadcasting and amplifying false and misleading narratives about Plaintiff, and
24 in failing to retract or correct the harm despite knowing the truth. Accordingly, Plaintiff is entitled to
25 an award of punitive and exemplary damages in an amount to be determined at trial.
26
27
28

THIRD CLAIM FOR RELIEF
(Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress)
Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants

91. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

92. Defendants' conduct, as alleged herein, was outrageous and carried out with the intent to cause Plaintiff severe emotional distress. Defendants acted with reckless disregard for the truth by deliberately omitting critical medical records and context that would have clarified the nature and trajectory of Plaintiff's disability. Instead, they presented a distorted narrative suggesting that Plaintiff had fabricated symptoms, suffered from mental instability, or was engaged in deception. This defamatory framing, disseminated nationally through the Inside Edition segment, was designed to provoke public ridicule and humiliation. Defendants knew, or acted with a high degree of certainty, that broadcasting such a segment about a private individual would result in significant emotional harm once it was distributed and repeatedly circulated to the public.

93. As a direct and substantial result of Defendants' wrongful and malicious conduct, Plaintiff suffered severe emotional distress.

94. Defendants' acts were willful, wanton, malicious, oppressive, and carried out in conscious disregard for Plaintiff's rights, thereby justifying an award of punitive and exemplary damages according to proof at trial.

FOURTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF
(Violation of California Civil Code § 3344)
Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants

95. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

1 96. Plaintiff is a private individual whose name and likeness became widely recognizable as
2 a result of viral media coverage beyond her control. Although not a public figure by profession,
3 Plaintiff's image and identity have been used and disseminated without authorization in a manner that
4 exploited her likeness for commercial gain, in violation of her statutory and common law rights of
5 publicity under California Civil Code § 3344.

6 97. Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside Edition Inc., without
7 Plaintiff's prior consent, knowingly used Plaintiff's name, photograph, and likeness in connection with
8 a nationally broadcast segment that originally aired in 2010. In April 2025, this segment was materially
9 altered, republished, and widely redistributed across digital platforms, causing it to go viral once again.
10 These renewed publications featured Plaintiff's image, identity, and likeness without authorization and
11 for commercial purposes, including generating traffic and advertising revenue through Defendants'
12 various media channels.
13

14 98. Defendants' conduct constitutes a clear violation of California Civil Code § 3344, which
15 prohibits the knowing use of another's name, voice, photograph, or likeness for purposes of advertising
16 or selling goods or services without prior consent. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants'
17 unauthorized use of Plaintiff's name, image, and likeness, Plaintiff has suffered substantial harm,
18 including reputational damage, loss of professional and business opportunities, severe emotional
19 distress, and economic injury. The defamatory and misleading nature of the republished Inside Edition
20 segment has irreparably harmed Plaintiff's personal and professional standing, reigniting public
21 ridicule and undermining years of effort to rebuild her career and reputation.
22

23 99. Pursuant to California Civil Code § 3344(a), Plaintiff is entitled to the greater of \$750 or
24 actual damages, as well as any profits attributable to Defendants' unauthorized use of her name and
25 likeness.
26

FIFTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF

(Violations of the California Unruh Civil Rights Act Cal. Civ. Code § 51)

Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants

100. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

101. California Civil Code § 51, known as the Unruh Civil Rights Act, provides that all persons within the jurisdiction of California are entitled to full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments, regardless of sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status.

102. Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside Edition Inc. are business establishments within the meaning of the Unruh Civil Rights Act because they operate commercial media entities that distribute programming and content to the public for profit in the State of California.

103. Plaintiff is a California resident who suffers from a rare and documented neurological condition that qualifies as a medical condition and/or disability under California law.

104. Defendants, through their broadcast and subsequent republication of the Inside Edition segment, engaged in discriminatory and unequal treatment by portraying Plaintiff in a false and defamatory manner based on her medical condition. Defendants' conduct effectively denied Plaintiff equal dignity, subjected her to public ridicule, and exploited her condition for entertainment and profit without regard for her rights.

105. Defendants, through the trademark INSIDE EDITION, publicly assert in United States Registration No. 5,749,893 that they provide "entertainment services, namely, a continuing multimedia series featuring news and current events rendered through the media of television, cable, satellite and

1 broadband systems, and via the Internet, and portable and wireless communication devices.” As a
2 member of the public, and as the unwilling subject of their broadcast, Plaintiff was entitled to equal
3 dignity, accurate representation, and respectful treatment in the delivery of those services. Instead,
4 Defendants denied Plaintiff the benefit of these services by portraying her disability in a defamatory,
5 mocking, and exploitative manner. By using their platform to publicly distort Plaintiff’s condition while
6 omitting verified medical records, Defendants discriminated against her in the provision of a public-
7 facing business service, in violation of the Unruh Civil Rights Act.

8
9 106. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants’ unlawful conduct, Plaintiff has suffered
10 harm, including emotional distress, reputational damage, and economic loss.

11 107. Plaintiff is entitled to statutory damages, injunctive relief, and any other relief the Court
12 deems just and proper under Cal. Civ. Code § 52.

13
14 **SIXTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF**
15 **(Violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act 42 U.S.C. § 12182)**
16 **Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants**

17 108. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each
18 and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

19 109. Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (“ADA”), codified at 42 U.S.C.
20 § 12182, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods,
21 services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation
22 by any person who owns, leases, or operates a place of public accommodation.

23 110. Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside Edition Inc. own and
24 operate commercial media outlets that are open to the public and constitute “places of public
25 accommodation” under 42 U.S.C. § 12181(7)(E), which includes places of exhibition and
26 entertainment, as well as service establishments engaged in public communications.

111. Plaintiff is an individual with a rare and medically documented neurological condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities, qualifying her as a person with a disability under the ADA.

112. Despite knowledge of Plaintiff's condition and access to medical records and factual context, Defendants chose to depict Plaintiff in a misleading and defamatory manner that exploited her disability for commercial purposes. The Inside Edition segment falsely portrayed Plaintiff as mentally unstable, dishonest, or attention-seeking, rather than truthfully representing her as a person managing a complex medical condition.

113. By doing so, Defendants denied Plaintiff the full and equal enjoyment of services offered to the public, namely, fair, accurate, and non-discriminatory media coverage. Instead, Defendants used their platform to marginalize and demean Plaintiff on the basis of her disability.

114. Defendants' actions constitute discrimination in violation of Title III of the ADA and reflect a failure to provide accessible, respectful, and nondiscriminatory services to individuals with disabilities.

115. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' conduct, Plaintiff has suffered substantial harm, including emotional distress, reputational injury, loss of professional opportunities, and economic damages.

116. Plaintiff seeks declaratory and injunctive relief, including the removal of the defamatory content, as well as compensatory damages and any other relief the Court deems just and proper under 42 U.S.C. § 12188.

SEVENTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF
(Negligent Supervision, Hiring, and Retention)
Plaintiff Townsend v. All Defendants

1 117. Ms. Townsend hereby repeats, reiterates, re-alleges and incorporates by reference each
2 and every allegation of the Complaint as if set forth fully herein.

3 118. At all relevant times, Defendants Paramount Global, CBS Broadcasting Inc., and Inside
4 Edition Inc. employed and/or retained editorial personnel, producers, and executive staff responsible
5 for researching, editing, and broadcasting the defamatory and misleading segment concerning Plaintiff,
6 which originally aired in 2010 and was republished in materially altered form in April 2025.

7 119. Upon information and belief, Defendants knew or should have known that certain
8 employees and editorial decision-makers within Inside Edition had previously engaged in reckless,
9 misleading, or defamatory reporting practices, including but not limited to the publication of similarly
10 damaging and widely criticized content involving other public figures such as actor and director James
11 Franco. Despite being on notice of prior misconduct and foreseeable risks of harm, Defendants failed
12 to implement adequate editorial oversight, journalistic standards, or disciplinary action to prevent
13 further injury.
14

15 120. Defendants' failure to properly supervise, investigate, or restrict the authority of their
16 editorial employees directly enabled the publication and subsequent republication of the defamatory
17 segment concerning Plaintiff. This lack of institutional oversight was a substantial factor in causing the
18 reputational harm, emotional distress, and economic injury Plaintiff has endured as a result of the
19 broadcast and its widespread online redistribution.
20

21 121. The harm to Plaintiff was not only foreseeable—it was the direct result of Defendants'
22 ongoing pattern of negligent retention and supervision of staff who had previously demonstrated
23 disregard for accuracy, fairness, and ethical media practices. Rather than removing or restraining those
24 individuals, Defendants empowered them to engage in the same conduct again, resulting in irreparable
25 damage to Plaintiff's personal and professional standing.
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122. As a proximate result of Defendants' negligent supervision, hiring, and retention, Plaintiff has suffered reputational injury, emotional distress, and interference with prospective professional and political opportunities. Plaintiff is entitled to compensatory and punitive damages in an amount to be proven at trial.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF


Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment as follows:

1. For total damages in the amount of \$100,000,000.
2. For general damages, including emotional distress damages, according to proof on each cause of action for which such damages are available.
3. For special damages, according to proof of each cause of action for which such damages are available.
4. For compensatory damages, including emotional distress damages according to proof on each cause of action for which such damages are available.
5. For punitive damages and/or exemplary damages, as allowed by law, in an amount according to proof on each cause of action for which such damages are available.
6. For prejudgment interest and post-judgment interest according to law.
7. For costs of suit incurred in this action.
8. For such other and further relief that the Court deems proper and just.
9. Plaintiff affirms that, should the Court award any monetary damages in her favor in this action, she intends to allocate fifty percent (50%) of such award to actor and director James Franco.

Dated: July 24, 2025

By: 
DESIREE GUERRIERE TOWNSEND
Plaintiff

EXHIBIT A

**BALANCE TRANSFERS**

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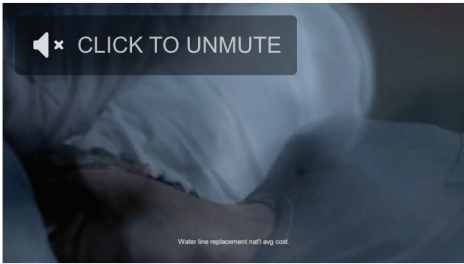


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NEWS

Flu Shot Woman



By Inside Edition

Updated: 12:00 AM PST, February 4, 2010

First Published: 4:00 PM PST, February 3, 2010



Desiree Jennings is the woman who claimed she developed dystonia after receiving a seasonal flu shot, but INSIDE EDITION has observed her walking normally, playing with her dogs, and even driving! Is she cured? INSIDE EDITION investigates.

Her story created a national uproar. Desiree Jennings, an ambassador for the Washington Redskins cheerleading squad, claimed she developed a rare neurological disorder called dystonia after receiving a seasonal flu shot, causing dramatic spasms and slurred speech.

What made the story so startling is that her symptoms seemed to disappear when she walked backwards or ran.

Back in October 2009, Jennings and her husband told INSIDE EDITION's Les Trent they worried they'd never find a cure. But INSIDE EDITION cameras found her walking normally, playing with her dogs, going shopping, even getting behind the wheel of a car and driving!

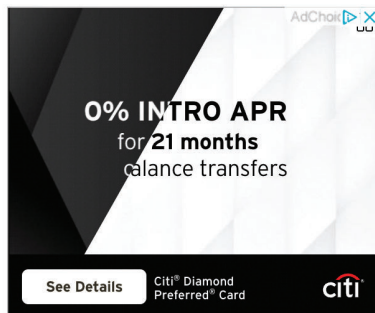
It's hard to believe the woman INSIDE EDITION producers have been discreetly observing over the last few weeks is the same woman who contributed to the flu shot scare. INSIDE EDITION sent Les Trent to ask Jennings about her remarkable recovery.





"We've been trying to reach you and you have not been returning our phone calls," Trent told Jennings after catching up with her in a parking lot.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said.



"It looks like you've made a complete recovery," Trent told her.

"Well, I wouldn't say a complete recovery. I still have a lot of cognitive issues," she said.

So what happened? Did Desiree Jennings really suffer a one-in-a-million reaction to the seasonal flu shot, as she says, or is it all some kind of elaborate hoax? Or is it something else entirely?

INSIDE EDITION has obtained an official report on Jennings's case by the Centers for Disease Control. It states, "The admitting neurologist felt that there was a strong psychogenic component" to her symptoms. "Psychogenic" means that there is a mental or psychological cause for her spasms.

"The dramatic symptoms of movement and speech that Miss Jennings has been displaying are certainly not a reaction to the vaccine," says Dr. Steven Novella.

Novella is an Assistant Professor of Neurology at Yale who treats patients with dystonia, which what Jennings claimed she suffered from after the seasonal flu shot. He hasn't examined Jennings, but is convinced after viewing our video that her affliction is not dystonia.



"Just from looking at the video, a trained and experienced neurologist could say, 'This is not dystonia,' " he tells INSIDE EDITION.

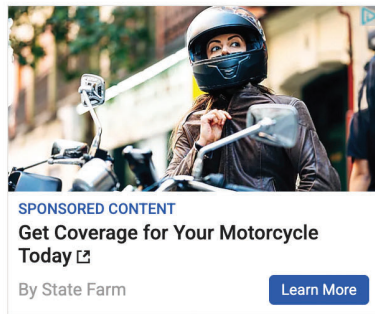
Jennings finds the idea that her illness is all in her head ridiculous.

"Some people think it was psychogenic. Some people might even think it's a hoax," Trent told Jennings.

"I mean people are free to believe whatever they want but clearly what I've been going through, I know it's not psychogenic and it's not a hoax," she said.

And something else that surprised INSIDE EDITION producers? Jennings is now speaking with a foreign accent she never had before.

"I'm from Ohio. I should not be talking like this," she told Trent.



"It sounds like you have an Australian accent," Trent observed.

"Yeah, I've heard Australian, British, but it essentially comes down to the inability to pronounce words," she explained.

"There's no way a flu shot can cause someone's accent to change. Absolutely not," Dr. Novella says.

So how does Jennings explain her recovery? She credited a doctor, an alternative practitioner named Rashid Buttar. He claims he reversed many of her symptoms in less than 48 hours using controversial therapies, including a hyperbaric chamber and intravenous injections of nutrients and synthetic amino acids.

But Buttar has come under fire for his practices. The North Carolina medical board claims he engaged in "unprofessional conduct" for charging cancer patients "exorbitant fees" for "unproven" and "ineffective" treatments, some of the very same treatments Jennings received. He denies any wrongdoing.

"Are you concerned that your case has generated so much interest and in particular has politicized the whole issue of vaccines?" Trent asked her.



"No, not really. It's just what happened to me," she said.

INSIDE EDITION has to point out one other thing. When Jennings first walked out of a store and into the shopping center parking lot, she seemed to be walking

She also told INSIDE EDITION, "Don't catch me driving 'cause I don't think I'm supposed to be driving."

Jennings is no longer seeing the controversial Dr. Buttar, but she did show INSIDE EDITION a report from a doctor who also believes her symptoms were vaccination-induced.

recovery

doctor

report

shopping

illness

ohio

cancer

Tags:

store

fire

washington

rare

phone

official

disease

patient



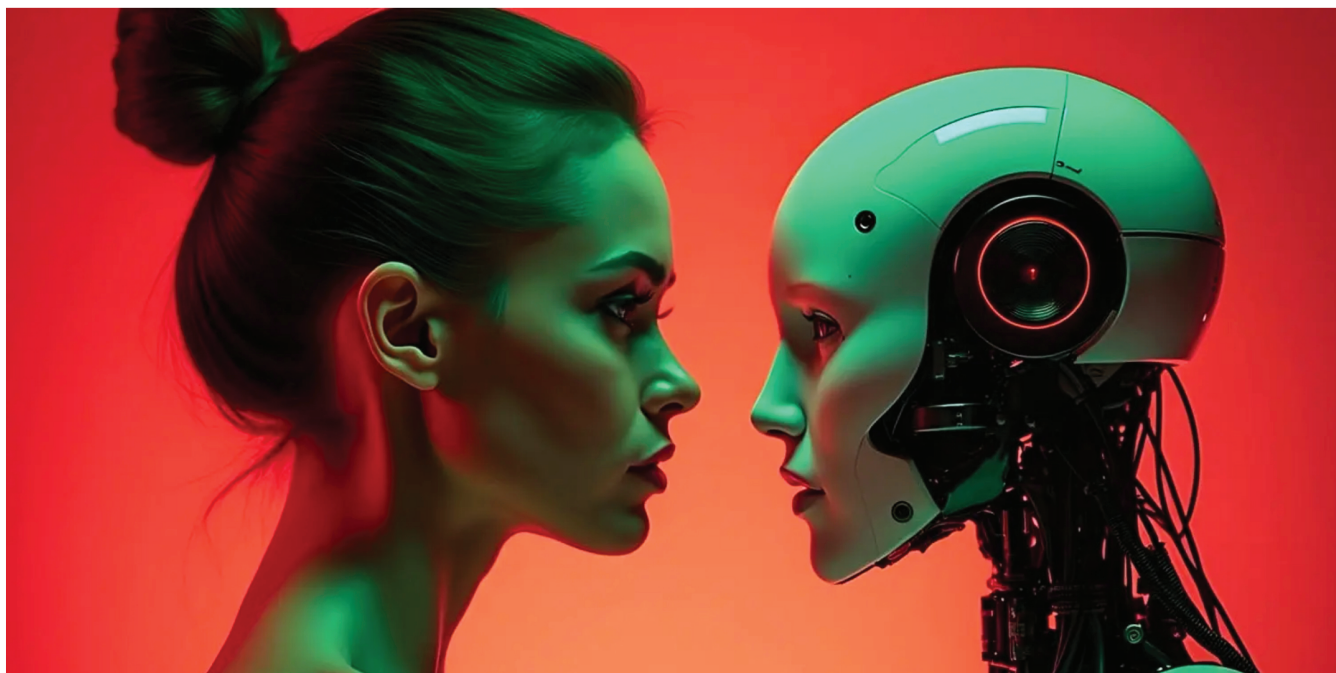
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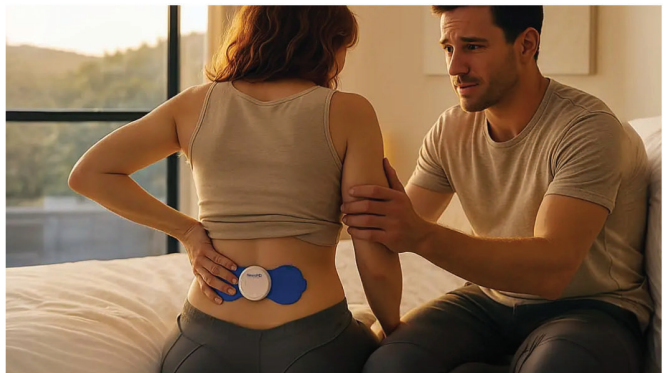
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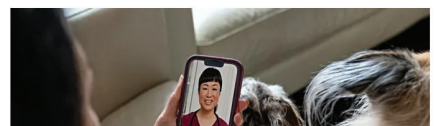
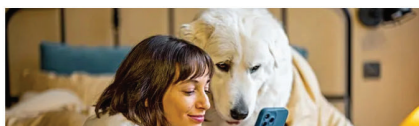
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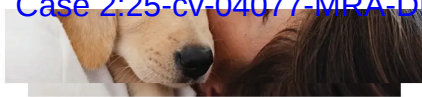


Amazon Is Losing Money as Arizona Shoppers Are Canceling Prime for This Clever Hack

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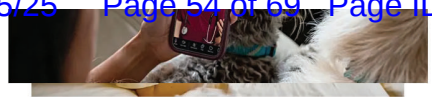
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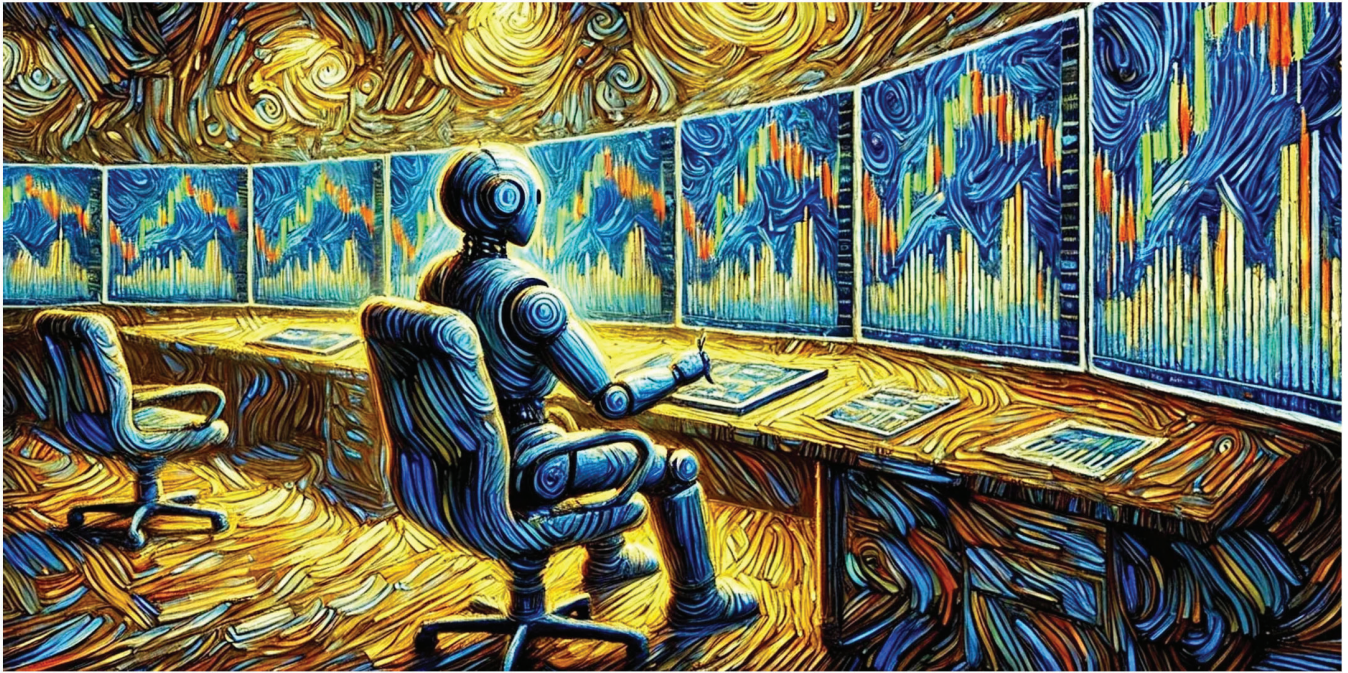
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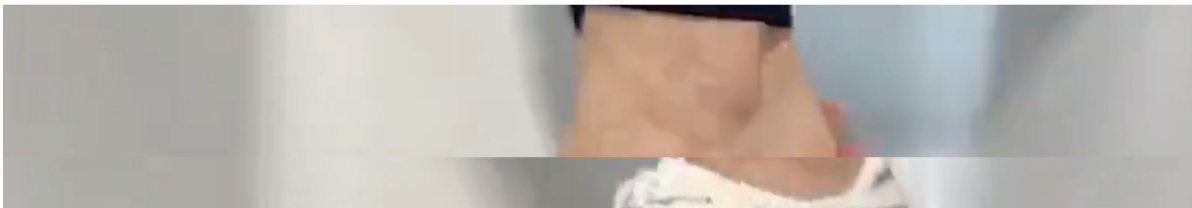
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EXHIBIT B



Outlook

Re: Request for Removal of Harmful Press Release Dated 02/04/2010

From Cataldi, Bettina <Bettina.Cataldi@cbs.com>
Date Thu 4/17/2025 12:45 PM
To Desirée Townsend <desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com>
Cc Gaudio, Samantha <Samantha.Gaudio@viacomcbs.com>; Admin <admin@hollywoodtrademarks.com>

Dear Ms. Townsend,

This video does not appear on our digital platforms. It is unfortunate that you have been subjected to hateful comments, but we do not have the ability to police the behavior of people on online platforms we do not control.

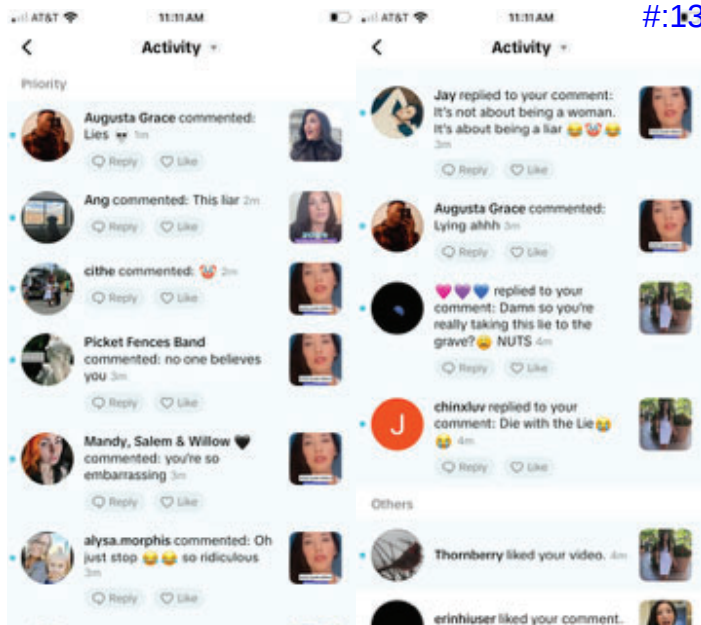
Bettina

From: Desirée Townsend <desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 16, 2025 2:14 PM
To: Cataldi, Bettina <Bettina.Cataldi@cbs.com>
Cc: Gaudio, Samantha <Samantha.Gaudio@viacomcbs.com>; Erik Alberts <erik.alberts@ea-lawfirm.com>; Admin <admin@hollywoodtrademarks.com>
Subject: Re: Request for Removal of Harmful Press Release Dated 02/04/2010

<External Email>

Hello Ms. Cataldi,

I respectfully ask that you please put me in touch with one of your journalists or news organizations. This is unacceptable abuse to continue to be subjected to for 16 years. **In 2025, I should not be told by people to DIE because I have a disease.**



Best regards,
Desirée

Desirée S. Townsend
Senior Paralegal
Phone: (323) 844-1338
Email: desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com
hollywoodtrademarks.com



On Apr 15, 2025, at 7:18 PM, Desirée Townsend <desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com> wrote:

Dear Ms. Cataldi,
I hope this message finds you well. I'm writing with one more request, and I completely understand if it's outside your purview, but I felt it was worth asking.
In the past week, I've gone viral again on TikTok after two users posted the following videos, which have **received collectively 3 million views and counting.**

- <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT2oJ14MG/>
- <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT2otJLVA/>

I am now receiving tens of thousands of views and **thousands of hateful, derogatory, and even threatening comments:**

- <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTjLYWgVU/>
- <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTjLYvp2R/>

Much of the public's perception fueling these comments stems from the Inside Edition segment that aired in 2010. I have no intention of pursuing legal action, but I am respectfully asking if your organization might consider helping me set the record straight. At the time of filming, I informed the journalist I was on medication and provided supporting medical documentation. Unfortunately, this information did not make it into the final cut. Since then, I've spent years trying to clear my name and correct the record. I would be open and willing to participate in a follow-up segment with Inside Edition or any other CBS affiliate. I can provide all relevant medical records and address any questions with full transparency. This ongoing public misconception continues to cause significant reputational harm, has led to lost employment opportunities, affects the attorney I currently work for (copied here), and has caused me deep emotional distress. If you or someone from your team could connect me with a producer or journalist interested in revisiting this story in the spirit of transparency and accountability, I would be deeply grateful.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,
Desirée

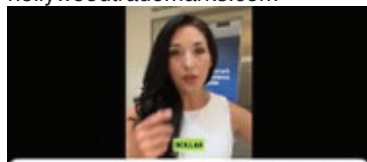
Desirée S. Townsend

Senior Paralegal

Phone: (323) 844-1338

Email: desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com

hollywoodtrademarks.com



On Apr 14, 2025, at 10:10 AM, Cataldi, Bettina <Bettina.Cataldi@cbs.com> wrote:

Hi Desiree,

We received your email and stand by the accuracy of our report. However, as a courtesy, we are removing the press release from our website.

From: Desirée Townsend <desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 10, 2025 1:52 PM
To: Cataldi, Bettina <Bettina.Cataldi@cbs.com>; Strichman, Hayley <Hayley.Strichman@paramount.com>; Gaudio, Samantha <Samantha.Gaudio@viacomcbs.com>; avery.lotz@axios.com <avery.lotz@axios.com>
Subject: Request for Removal of Harmful Press Release Dated 02/04/2010

<External Email>

Dear Paramount/CBS Media Ventures Team,

I am writing to formally request the removal of a press release published by your organization on February 4, 2010, titled "*Real, A Hoax, Or Something Else...Did A Flu Shot Cause Woman to Get Dystonia?*" which is still accessible at the following link:
<https://www.paramountpressexpress.com/cbs-media-ventures/shows/inside-edition/releases/?view=24173>

At the time of filming with Inside Edition, I **provided medical documentation confirming I was undergoing treatment for symptoms** that were ultimately diagnosed as Stiff Person Syndrome, a rare and serious neurological condition. Despite this, the release and associated segment imply that my illness was a hoax or psychogenic in nature, relying on selectively presented information provided by the CDC rather than the actual records from my treating physician.

Although this publication may fall outside the statute of limitations for legal action, the continued public availability of this release is deeply harmful and misleading. It undermines my credibility, stigmatizes a legitimate medical condition, and has caused ongoing reputational damage—particularly as I prepare to enter public service with a campaign for Mayor of Los Angeles.

This press release has not aged well, and its framing contributes to the harmful practice of dismissing women's medical conditions as psychological without basis. In the interest of fairness and accuracy, I respectfully request that your organization remove this content from public view.

Thank you for your time and understanding. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,
 Desirée

Desirée S. Townsend
Senior Paralegal
 Phone: (323) 844-1338
 Email: desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com
hollywoodtrademarks.com



EXHIBIT C

**DESIRÉE
TOWNSEND**

IP & LITIGATION PARALEGAL



(323)-844-1338



desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com

2901 Ocean Park Blvd., Ste. 201
Santa Monica, California 90405

April 18, 2025

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL & E-MAIL

Bettina Cataldi
CBS Media Ventures / Inside Edition
c/o Paramount Global
555 W 57th Street
New York, NY 10019
Bettina.Cataldi@cbs.com

Koy Saechao
Agent for Service of Process
c/o Paramount Global
2710 Gateway Oaks Drive
Sacramento, CA 95833

Re: **FORMAL RETRACTION DEMAND PURSUANT TO CALIFORNIA CIVIL
CODE § 48a**

Dear Ms. Cataldi,

I am writing to submit a formal demand for retraction pursuant to California Civil Code § 48a, in connection with the *Inside Edition* segment published and broadcast by CBS Media Ventures on or about February 3, 2010, and featuring myself, Desirée Townsend (formerly known as Desiree Jennings). The segment remains publicly accessible here: <https://www.insideedition.com/159-flu-shot-woman>. Interestingly, while the accompanying video segment has long since been removed, the originally published article remains readily accessible through a simple Google search. Even the article's headline is demeaning and reductive, referring to me merely as "Flu Shot Woman" rather than acknowledging the complexity of my condition or the fact that I was ultimately diagnosed with a rare neurological disease.

On or about April 10, 2025, I formally requested that your organization remove a related press release, nearly identical in language to the article above, which falsely insinuates that I fabricated a medical condition and that your camera crew captured me in the act of malingering. This implication is entirely refuted by medical records I provided to your journalist at the time of



**DESIRÉE
TOWNSEND**

IP & LITIGATION PARALEGAL



(323)-844-1338



desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com



2901 Ocean Park Blvd., Ste. 201
Santa Monica, California 90405

filming, including documentation from my treating physician confirming that I was undergoing legitimate medical treatment and actively prescribed medication during the period in question. These records were intentionally excluded from the final edit, resulting in a broadcast that was incomplete, misleading, and defamatory by omission. Despite being notified of these omissions and of the continued weaponization of your content against me, your organization has failed to issue any clarification, correction, or update to the public record. However, your public relations team did agree to remove the original press release.

Furthermore, your organization has permitted the rampant reproduction and republication of this original, copyright-protected broadcast, which has recently flourished across social media platforms. On or about June 19, 2024, actor and *Access Hollywood* host Mario Lopez republished **your copyrighted content**, accompanied by defamatory commentary, on his personal and verified Instagram account. The post can be viewed here: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C8Zx0QdpG9c/>.



mariolopez • Follow

flex_in_the_stars • Original audio



mariolopez There's gotta be some kind of award for this performance...

#MethodActor #OscarWorthy

43w



cheerleader4change You are so f-ing gross @mariolopez. I have been constantly harassed for having a rare disease, I have considered suicide multiple times including this time last year and thank god I never saw this then because I may have done something I could not come back from. I hope you lose your job an never work again. AND I PROMISE YOU I will file a defamation case against you soon and



13,540 likes

June 19, 2024

In an apparent attempt to capitalize on the virality of this inflammatory content, more third parties have recently republished the defamatory material on the social media platform TikTok. On or about April 4 and April 5, 2025, two separate TikTok accounts posted videos that have collectively garnered over 3.5 million views and counting. These videos closely replicate the same defamatory narrative presented in your original segment, **thereby renewing and amplifying the reputational harm caused by your organization**. (See <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT2oJ14MG/> for the April 4th video and <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT2otJLVA> for the April 5th).

**DESIRÉE
TOWNSEND**

IP & LITIGATION PARALEGAL



949-813-9373



desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com

2901 Ocean Park Blvd., Ste. 201,
Santa Monica, California 90405

Your organization is well-known for routine enforcement of copyright protections, including aggressive cease-and-desist notices and even federal copyright infringement litigation (e.g. *CBS Operations Inc. v. ComedyMX LLC et al.*). Which makes this **selective inaction** especially troubling. To evaluate your organization's copyright enforcement practices, I personally reposted the segment with minor edits on TikTok and Instagram. Notably, the content did not trigger any copyright enforcement or takedown measures on either platform, unlike with other CBS-owned content, which regularly results in immediate removal. This strongly suggests that CBS is knowingly permitting the ongoing circulation of this segment, thereby allowing renewed public interest and engagement around *Inside Edition* at my expense.

As a direct result of your organization's original segment and its continued republication, I have lost employment opportunities and remain fearful of losing current employment due to the enduring reputational damage. The relentless public mischaracterization has caused severe emotional distress, including episodes of depression, suicidal ideation, and worsening of my neurological autoimmune disease, which had previously been under control. Your refusal to correct or retract the defamatory content is not only prolonging the harm, it is actively exacerbating my medical condition and psychological well-being.

In light of this pattern, your failure to act, or to correct the public narrative, appears to be a conscious and strategic choice, rather than mere oversight. By knowingly permitting the continued public distribution of its copyrighted segment, including through platforms where it has the legal right and technical means to enforce takedown, CBS has facilitated the republication of defamatory content to a new audience. This inaction, following direct notice of harm, constitutes a reckless disregard for the truth and **supports my renewed claims against your organization for defamation, false light, and negligent infliction of emotional distress.**

Accordingly, I hereby demand that CBS and Inside Edition:

- **Issue a retraction of the original segment**, publicly acknowledging its misleading nature and omission of critical medical evidence;
- **Publish a correction clearly stating that, at the time of filming, I was under active medical care for a neurological condition which included treating medications** — medical documentation of which was provided to your organization.
- Take all reasonable and timely measures to ensure that the segment is no longer being **distributed, monetized, or publicly accessible without proper correction or clarification by CBS, Inside Edition, or any affiliated entities or licensees** — including the prompt filing of takedown requests with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

**DESIRÉE
TOWNSEND**

IP & LITIGATION PARALEGAL



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Santa Monica, California 90405

Failure to comply with this demand will leave me no choice but to pursue immediate legal action for defamation, false light, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and other applicable torts under California law. Pursuant to California Civil Code § 48a, I am formally requesting that your organization issue a full and adequate retraction and correction. If I do not receive a response **within fourteen (14) days of this letter**, I will proceed with filing a legal Complaint against your organization and will seek general, special, and punitive damages. These special damages include, but are not limited to: loss of employment and future professional opportunities, reputational harm, out-of-pocket medical expenses resulting from the exacerbation of my autoimmune condition, and mental health treatment costs arising from the severe emotional distress caused by your continued inaction.

Nothing in this letter, nor any act or omission to act on my part, or should be deemed to be a waiver, abridgment, alteration, modification or reduction of any right, claims, defenses, and remedies that I may have regarding this matter and all such rights, claims, defenses, and remedies, whether at law or in equity, are hereby expressly reserved.

I urge your organization to take this demand seriously. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Desirée Guerrière Townsend

EXHIBIT D

JASSY | VICK | CAROLAN

LOS ANGELES | SAN FRANCISCO

355 South Grand Avenue, Suite 2450 | Los Angeles, CA 90071 | T 310.870.7048 | F 310.870.7010 | JASSYVICK.COM

Jean-Paul Jassy
jpjassy@jassylvick.com

April 25, 2025

VIA E-MAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Desirée Townsend
2901 Ocean Park Blvd., Ste. 201
Santa Monica, CA 90405
desiree@hollywoodtrademarks.com

Re: *February 2010 Inside Edition Report*

Dear Ms. Townsend:

I am outside litigation counsel to CBS Media Ventures/Inside Edition (“Inside Edition”), and am writing in response to your April 18, 2025 retraction demand letter (the “April 18 Letter”). For reasons explained further below, Inside Edition will not be issuing a retraction in response to your demand.

Your retraction demand concerns an Inside Edition report first published over 15 years ago (the “Report”). The statute of limitations on any conceivable claim related to the Report expired well over a decade ago. *See, e.g.,* Cal. C. Civ. Proc. § 340(c) (one-year statute of limitations for defamation); *Roberts v. McAfee, Inc.*, 660 F.3d 1156, 1169 (9th Cir. 2011) (affirming application of one-year statute of limitations to defamation and false light claims); *see also* Cal. C. Civ. Proc. § 335.1 (other types of torts have a two-year statute of limitations); *Wassmann v. S. Orange Cnty. Comm’t’y College Dist.*, 24 Cal. App. 5th 825, 852-53 (2018) (applying two-year statute to claim for intentional infliction of emotional distress); *Sahadi v. Schaeffer*, 155 Cal. App. 4th 704, 715 (2007) (same for negligence). The statute of limitations for any claim based on the Report accrued with the first publication, which your April 18 Letter correctly acknowledges was in February, 2010. Cal. Civ. C. § 3425.3 (single publication rule starts accrual of statute of limitations at first publication); *see also Shively v. Bozanich*, 31 Cal. 4th 1230, 1245-46 (2003) (same). This rule applies where, as here, material remains continuously on the internet. *Traditional Cat Assn., Inc. v. Gilbreath*, 118 Cal. App. 4th 392, 397-405 (2004). Thus, even if you ever had a viable claim—and we dispute that you ever did—it was time-barred many years ago.

Your April 18 Letter notes that, at your request and as a courtesy to you, Inside Edition recently removed a press release that was posted online related to the subject matter of the Report (the “Press Release”). That Press Release was first published in February, 2010. Thus,

April 25, 2025
Page 2

although you do not specifically threaten any claim based on the Press Release, any such claim would also be time-barred.

Similarly, to the extent your April 18 Letter invokes California's retraction statute, the demand itself is, among other defects, also untimely and therefore unavailable here. Cal. Civ. C. § 48a(a) (retraction demands must be made within 20 days of publication).

To be clear, Inside Edition rejects any suggestion that its Report was defamatory or otherwise could have ever given rise to any type of viable legal claim at any time. Inside Edition accurately reported on your condition both when you first injected yourself into the public sphere, and in its follow up reporting in February 2010, which raised questions and included your comments and position. *Chapin v. Knight-Ridder, Inc.*, 993 F.2d 1087, 1094 (4th Cir. 1993) ("inquiry itself, however embarrassing or unpleasant to its subject, is not accusation"); *Thomas v. Los Angeles Times Commc'ns LLC*, 189 F.Supp.2d 1005, 1016 (C.D. Cal. 2002) (quoting from and endorsing *Chapin's* rule that "raising of questions" is not actionable). You are a public figure on the issue of your medical condition, as well as more generally in your capacity as a candidate for mayor of Los Angeles. Because you are a public figure, any publication-based claim would need to be proven with actual malice—*i.e.*, knowledge of falsity or reckless disregard for the truth—with clear and convincing evidence "such as to command the unhesitating assent of every reasonable mind." *Beilenson v. Superior Court*, 44 Cal. App. 4th 944, 950 (1996); *see also Monitor Patriot Co. v. Roy*, 401 U.S. 265, 273 (1971) (candidates for public office must prove actual malice); *Reader's Digest Ass'n v. Superior Court*, 37 Cal.3d 244, 253 (1984) (persons who voluntarily seek attention on a matter of public interest are subject to the actual malice standard). Even if your threatened claims were not time-barred (and they are), you would not be able to satisfy the actual malice standard because there is no evidence that Inside Edition acted with actual malice in its reporting. And your April 18 Letter's suggestion that Inside Edition was somehow obligated to include particular materials or positions is not supported under the law: "The choice of material to go into a [broadcast] . . . constitute[s] the exercise of editorial control and judgment," and is protected under the First Amendment. *Miami Herald Publ'g Co. v. Tornillo*, 418 U.S. 241, 258 (1974). Inside Edition had no obligation to include your "talking points," or what you considered to be "key facts" or "context" into its Report. *Paterno v. Superior Court*, 163 Cal. App. 4th 1342, 1352-55 (2008).

Your communications this month, including the April 18 Letter, also express your concerns about the actions of third parties on social media (*e.g.*, Instagram and TikTok) posting and reposting materials and comments online. Inside Edition has no control over such third parties or their actions and cannot be held responsible for what they post online. Additionally, Inside Edition is immune from liability for such conduct under 47 U.S.C. § 230(c)(1) of the Communications Decency Act ("Section 230"). *See also Barrett v. Rosenthal*, 40 Cal. 4th 33, 39, 58-62 (2006) (applying Section 230 immunity to claims based on third party's online publication).

Contrary to contentions in your April 18 Letter, Inside Edition is not required to engage in the process of issuing takedown notices across the internet at your request. Inside Edition has no legal obligation to demand the takedown of third party content, whether at its own impetus or

April 25, 2025
Page 3

at the request of others such as yourself.¹ You do not cite, and we are not aware of, any authority to support the proposition that a copyright holder's decision not to pursue claims of copyright infringement can restart the statute of limitations for defamation or any other tort. Nor are we aware of any authority to support the proposition that a defendant must pursue copyright infringement claims against all infringers or else lose the ability to raise the statute of limitations as a defense. Indeed, this unsupported theory would run contrary to the basic rule that ongoing internet publications are not considered continuing torts, *see Traditional Cat Assn.*, 118 Cal. App. 4th at 399-404, and it would also violate the basic rule that publishers cannot be held liable for failing to retract a statement upon which doubt is placed after publication, *see, e.g., D.A.R.E. America v. Rolling Stone Magazine*, 101 F.Supp.2d 1270, 1287 (C.D. Cal. 2000) ("There is no authority to support Plaintiffs' argument that a publisher may be liable for defamation because it fails to retract a statement upon which grave doubt is cast after publication.").

You have no viable claim against Inside Edition. Please understand that if you bring any claim against Inside Edition, its affiliates or employees, we will respond vigorously, including by bringing an anti-SLAPP motion under California Code of Civil Procedure § 425.16. If we prevail on such a motion—and we are confident that we would—then you would be required to reimburse Inside Edition for all attorneys' fees and costs. *Ketchum v. Moses*, 24 Cal. 4th 1122, 1131 (2001) ("under Code of Civil Procedure section 425.16, subdivision (c), any SLAPP defendant who brings a successful motion to strike is entitled to mandatory attorney fees").

The foregoing is not a full recitation of facts or law. All rights, positions and arguments are expressly reserved.

Sincerely,



Jean-Paul Jassy
JASSY VICK CAROLAN LLP

¹ We note also that even you are using portions of the Report on your TikTok account in a purported effort to "rebut"—which apparently revived attention for—Inside Edition's 15-year-old story. *See, e.g.,* <https://www.tiktok.com/@cheerleader4change/video/7492305707371613486> (using the Report to compare yourself to Celine Dion). That post comes amidst many other TikTok posts concerning your mayoral campaign, and unwarranted threats to sue CBS, *e.g.,* <https://www.tiktok.com/@cheerleader4change/photo/7494692340292914475>, <https://www.tiktok.com/@cheerleader4change/photo/7495056455649725739>, and a claim that you "head[] a law firm's litigation arm," <https://www.tiktok.com/@cheerleader4change/video/7496148600779705646>, even though you are not a member of the Bar.