

August 20, 2021

Gov. Ron DeSantis,

I would like to call your attention to the actions of your press secretary this week that were both dangerous and in conflict with the spirit of Florida's constitutional protections for freedom of speech and of the press.

Using her Twitter account, Christina Pushaw threatened a journalist, retweeted other threats against that journalist and issued a call to action against The Associated Press. This is unacceptable behavior from a government employee, especially one whose job it is to work with the media and communicate with the public.

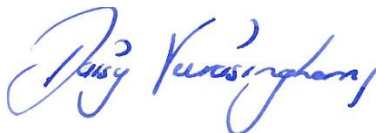
After expressing dissatisfaction with a story published by AP, she retweeted it, adding the words, "Drag Them." That was a direct effort to activate an online mob to attack a journalist for doing his job. It resulted in a torrent of abusive comments directed at the reporter.

Another one of her tweets threatened that if the journalist did not change the story to her liking, she would "put you on blast." She gave a deadline to meet her demand. She also retweeted someone's call to "Light. Them. Up," referring to the AP. After activating the mob, she then deleted some of the tweets. But their effect cannot be erased. And, even days later, she continued to issue threatening and insulting tweets.

This type of harassing behavior can cause great harm. Journalists are regularly subjected to abuse, rape threats, people stalking their family members and hacking their online personas. These actions can lead to violence and personal injury, and mental health consequences. While we can disagree about stories, it is unacceptable and dangerous for a public official to encourage the systemic bullying of journalists.

It is the type of behavior that the United States government routinely criticizes in other nations. It certainly has no place in a democracy that values robust and civil public discussion. This is not about one story, it is about harassing behavior from a public official that is unacceptable in any circumstance. We call on you to eliminate this attack strategy from your press office, and assure the people of Florida that there is no place for it in their state government.

Sincerely,



Daisy Veerasingham
Executive VP and Chief Operating Officer
Associated Press