

Statement of Elizabeth G. Oyer

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Before Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees

Hearing on Restoring Accountability and Attacks on the Rule of Law

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On March 7, 2025, I was terminated from a position at the Department of Justice that I had poured my heart and soul into for nearly three years. I was the Department's Pardon Attorney, a nonpolitical appointee in the career Senior Executive Service. At the time I was fired, I had over 13 years of dedicated federal service, plus seven years in private practice.

My job as Pardon Attorney was to advise the President on the use of his constitutional clemency power. I supervised a team of approximately 40 people who assisted with this function. All of us were career, nonpolitical appointees. All of us were dedicated to the mission of providing second chances through clemency to deserving Americans, without consideration of means, status, or politics.

Each year, the Department of Justice receives thousands of applications for executive clemency from citizens across the country. Most are ordinary Americans who do not have political connections, or access to the White House, or spare cash to pay attorneys and lobbyists. Many applications come handwritten from people in prison who are seeking early release from lengthy sentences—often mandatory minimums imposed under outdated sentencing laws. Some applications come carefully typed from people in the community seeking relief from burdensome collateral consequences of a dated criminal conviction after many years of exemplary conduct. The applications often include letters of support from loved ones who have seen their entire family life upended by the criminal justice system. Their hopes are resting on the slim promise of clemency.

When I was fired, there were over 6,000 clemency applications pending—mostly from ordinary Americans pleading with the President to exercise mercy and grant them second chances through clemency. My job as Pardon Attorney was to carefully vet these applicants, identify those truly worthy candidates, and get those cases onto the President's desk.

I fully expected to be able to continue this work under the current Administration. My team was standing by—ready, willing, and able to assist with this function—on Day 1.

Unfortunately, the new Administration showed little interest in considering our clemency recommendations. Instead, Department leadership redirected the resources of the Office of the Pardon Attorney toward an initiative to restore gun rights to Americans who lost the right to own a firearm due to criminal conduct. This is not a role the Office had ever played before, to my knowledge. Nevertheless, I jumped in on this project as soon as it was assigned to me. I joined a working group with other Department personnel, led by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General. I devoted substantial amounts of time to working with my team in good faith to accomplish the objectives of Department leadership.

Despite my best efforts to faithfully perform the work assigned to me, I was fired on March 7. I was not given any explanation for why I was fired. But the notice was delivered hours after I informed Department leadership that I could not acquiesce to a request they had made of me. Specifically, I had been asked to recommend restoring the firearm rights of a famous friend of the President who had lost his right to own a gun due to a domestic violence conviction. I declined to do so based on concerns about public safety.

It was about 2:00 on a Friday afternoon when I learned I was being fired. I was in a conference room meeting with colleagues from several other DOJ offices, as part of another Department working group. We were brainstorming about how to accomplish a particular priority of the Attorney General.

Halfway through the meeting, I was pulled out by my deputy. She frantically broke the news that uniformed security officers were waiting in my office, under instructions to serve me with termination papers and escort me out of the building.

I rushed back to my office, where I was given a three-sentence memo signed by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, firing me effective immediately. I had never met Mr. Blanche, and I received no explanation for my firing.

A short time later, I walked out of the building for the last time carrying a grocery bag filled with my personal effects. I left behind this wonderful, dedicated team that I had built. I had no time to say goodbye to them. I was in shock. Everyone I passed on the way out was in shock. It was a lot for my whole team to process, and I think we are still processing it. There have been so many emotions: sadness and disappointment, but also fear, confusion, and anger.

I want Todd Blanche and Pam Bondi to know: It is traumatic for everyone in the entire organization to see a beloved colleague and leader treated like this. My heart aches for my colleagues who had to go back into that office on Monday, with no explanation from DOJ leadership, and with no assurances about what the future holds for them. They are good, dedicated people, and they deserve better.

After I was fired, I chose to speak publicly about the events leading up to my termination. I felt that it was my obligation to share my concerns about the reckless, dangerous, and unethical use of Department resources to accomplish political objectives, including favors for loyalists and friends.

Shortly after, Deputy Attorney General Blanche contacted CNN and MSNBC to accuse me of lying. This still puzzles me, because Mr. Blanche and his staff have all the emails and memos documenting everything I have said. I have requested those documents from the Department under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), but as of today, Mr. Blanche's office has not produced them.

I have made some other, simple requests of DOJ since my termination. One was for my annual performance evaluations, which show that I received "outstanding" ratings each year. One was for my personnel file (eOPF), documenting my termination, which I would need to file for unemployment benefits. DOJ responded to me that these were "Complex" requests, and therefore I should not expect a response within any defined timeframe.

For weeks after my firing, DOJ also refused to provide me with documents to which I am legally entitled about the benefits I accrued during my federal service. This includes information I needed to ensure the continuity of health insurance coverage for my family. It includes information about my earned leave and retirement funds.

Finally, after the issue received some media attention, DOJ started responding to some of my requests.

On April 2—26 days after my termination—DOJ’s benefits provider, GRB (Government Retirement & Benefits, Inc.), sent me some basic information about my health insurance coverage. GRB sought to excuse its delay by stating that it had been “backlogged with separation packages in the past few weeks.”

The packet I received advised me that my insurance would expire in five days. It told me that to extend my coverage, the cost would more than quadruple. It advised me that to keep my family members covered, I would have to provide documentary proof of our familial relationships, including my marriage certificate, my child’s birth certificate, and proof of a common residence or joint tax filings. None of this documentation was required when I enrolled my family in the benefits programs as an employee. And of course, they left me just days to do all of that.

Sadly, I am just one of thousands of dedicated civil servants being treated with a lack of basic human decency. I see this as a dim reflection of the motives and priorities of those currently running our federal government.

I also want to talk about the lengths to which the Department of Justice has gone to prevent me from testifying here today.

On Friday night, at about 9:15 p.m., I learned that the Deputy Attorney General’s Office had directed the Department’s Security and Emergency Planning Staff to have two armed Special Deputy U.S. Marshals personally serve me with a letter at my home that night. The Deputy Marshals were directed to serve the letter between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m., when my teenage child was the only person at home. The letter was a warning to me about the risks of testifying here today.

Fortunately, while the armed officers were in route to my residence, I was able to confirm receipt of the letter—which had been sent to a secondary personal email address at 7:58 p.m.—and forestall the arrival of the officers at my home. Had Mr. Blanche’s office simply contacted me by telephone, or via the email address that I had repeatedly used to communicate with the Department in the preceding days, this whole, frightening incident could have been avoided.

My experience is just one example of a much broader pattern of attacks on career experts across the Department of Justice. These pervasive assaults by the political leadership of the Department are terrorizing the career workforce. This is not by accident or oversight—it is by design. The very purpose of systematically forcing out career employees is to invoke fear, so that fear will give way to blind loyalty.

The Attorney General has declared openly that she intends to “root out” those who persist in independent thinking or who place principles over politics. On day one in office, Attorney General Bondi told the entire, 115,000-person workforce that we are all the President’s lawyers. A few weeks later, she stood at the podium in the Great Hall and announced that she works “at

the directive of Donald Trump,” who has declared himself the country’s Chief Law Enforcement Officer.

This is wrong. Ms. Bondi and Mr. Blanche, like all DOJ lawyers, work for the American people. The Department of Justice is entrusted with keeping us safe, upholding our civil rights, and protecting the rule of law. DOJ is not a personal favor bank for the President. Its career employees are not the President’s personal debt collectors. It is dangerous and wrong to prioritize political loyalty over the laws of this nation, the safety of its citizens, and the fair and responsible administration of justice.