



October 21, 2025

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL WITH RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED AND EMAIL @
Editor@circlingthenews.com

Ms. Sue Pascoe
Circling the News
13900 Panay Way, Apt M116
Marina Del Ray, CA 90292

Re: Demand for Retraction, Correction, and preservation of Evidence

Dear Ms. Pascoe:

Please be advised that our firm has been retained by After the Fire USA (formerly Rebuild North Bay Foundation) (“ATFU”) and Jennifer Gray Thompson to investigate and pursue legal action against you and *Circling the News* (“CTN”), unless you agree to publicly remove and retract the false and defamatory oral and written statements made by you and published in CTN. These false statements include, but are not limited to the following:

- “She [Ms. Gray Thompson] raises a lot of money claiming to support fire recovery, but zero dollars go to fire victims.” Posted by you in an article published in CTN on [September 28, 2025](#). (“Article”)
- “Jennifer Gray Thompson is a “scam artist.” An oral statement made by you on October 13, 2025, to a number of attendees at a community roundtable held at 4242 Via Marina, Marina Del Ray, California

These defamatory and slanderous statements are false, were made in reckless disregard for the truth, and have caused—and continue to cause—serious harm to our clients’ reputation and credibility with the public and current or potential funders. Moreover, they have directly impeded the recovery efforts for fire survivors whom our clients are committed to serving.

The publication of these defamatory and slanderous statements is a serious breach of journalistic integrity and ethical responsibility which give rise to (among other claims), a claim for defamation *per se* for which damages are presumed.

A. FAILURE TO CONDUCT DUE DILIGENCE

ATFU is a *service-based*, survivor-led nonprofit founded after the 2017 megafires that claimed 43 lives and 8,900 structures across four counties. Its mission is to ensure no community walks alone after a megafire. Its services are free, strategic, and coordinated alongside local leaders.

According to a Letter of Support from Team Palisades (attached¹), signed by survivors Tony Hocking and Darragh Danton, they acknowledged that “*Team Palisades simply would not exist in its current form without [After the Fire USA’s] early and ongoing support... We can say with confidence that no organization has done more to support this effort.*”

They describe how Ms. Gray Thompson personally responded within minutes, how ATFU coached and launched the block captain network, and how your neighbors were connected, equipped, and seen because of my clients’ work.

Had you conducted a basic investigation prior to publishing the defamatory statement that “*zero dollars*” [raised by ATFU] go to fire victims and declaring that Ms. Gray Thompson is a “*scam artist*”, you would have easily discovered that ATFU does not—and has never—distributed cash directly to fire victims. Rather, ATFU is a service-based organization, born out of a megafire, and grown to be the only national nonprofit solely dedicated to helping megafire communities navigate post-disaster. ATFU connects megafire communities with a massive network of experienced fire survivors, subject matter experts, and adaptable tools and systems proven to aid recovery and sustain leadership for the long-term recovery. Since 2017, ATFU has a proven track record of results, including bringing the block captain program to the Palisades and Eaton Fires. ATFU is a highly respected and widely regarded as the leading organization post-megafire and is widely consulted by leaders from every sector as well as major media outlets and research institutions.

ATFU provides these services to megafire communities as a nonprofit service-based organization whose activities are easily tracked via public After Action Reports on the ATFU’s website, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn), as well as a large number of interviews easily accessed on television, radio, print news, and magazine long-form, and podcasts.

Verifiable public records accessible online confirm this undisputedly.²

In 2025 ATFU was awarded \$500,000 in FireAid funds, of which \$185,499 had been expended as of June 2025 for *the sole purpose of helping thousands of fire victims and communities impacted by wildfires, including those affected by the Palisades and Eaton fires through service-based assistance.*

With those funds, ATFU delivered 2,800+ hours of service in just five months; 1,000+ stakeholder meetings with survivors, government, schools, and mental health providers; 7 delegations of wildfire survivors and subject matter experts who shared their experiences and offered mentorship to emerging local leaders; 30+ public webinars, policy briefings, and guidance sessions; and block captain systems across Eaton and Palisades—a proven, survivor-led model of neighborhood resilience. This community-based, leadership-support model is central to ATFU’s mission. This

¹ An online link posted on July 28, 2025 with this letter can also be found [here](#) (under “Team Palisades Letter of Support”).

² Online links to these public records are listed in Exhibit A to this letter.

“zero dollar” false claim triggered a comment in the article implying that Ms. Gray Thompson is diverting funds raised by ATFU to her personal bank account.

Moreover, had you conducted minimal due diligence before publishing your defamatory statements, you would have discovered that some of the organizations involved in the FireAid concert did, in fact, provide direct cash assistance to fire victims. Others, such as ATFU, were specifically contracted to deliver direct services as described above—not to disburse funds directly to individuals.

To set the record straight after the article was written and published by you on CTN, Ms. Gray Thompson publicly [responded](#) on September 29 at 5:31 p.m., posting detailed, verifiable information—with accessible online links—showing how the funds raised by ATFU were used to support fire victims. She also explicitly requested the removal of any references falsely suggesting wrongdoing by either ATFU or herself. This included a demand to take down a defamatory comment posted on October 9, 2025, at 9:20 a.m. by an anonymous user identified only as “Fire Victim,” which read: “*Hello Jennifer, how much Fire Aid money went directly into your bank account?*”—a comment clearly based on your false reporting.

In her September 29 comment, Ms. Gray Thompson invited you to contact her directly or arrange a face-to-face meeting should you have any questions. This offer was made in the spirit of transparency and accountability, values that ATFU has consistently upheld and taken pride in as it works to support and care for fire victims.

Despite being made aware of the fact that ATFU does not, and did not distribute cash directly to fire victims and providing you with a clear opportunity to speak with Ms. Gray Thompson to understand why your statement was both false and defamatory, you chose not to make contact, nor did you take steps to correct or remove the defamatory statements and comments as requested.

As of today, the article containing these false, defamatory, and slanderous claims about ATFU and Ms. Gray Thompson—including the baseless and damaging comment implicating Ms. Gray Thompson personally diverted funds raised for fire victims into her own bank account—remains publicly available on CTN. The continued publication of these false and defamatory statements has caused, and continues to cause, significant harm to the reputation of both ATFU and Ms. Gray Thompson.

B. EVIDENCE OF ACTUAL MALICE

Public figures are entitled to protection from false and defamatory statements published with actual malice—that is, the false statement must have been made with knowledge of its falsity or **with reckless disregard for the truth**. *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254 (1964). That standard is met here.

Prior to publishing the false and defamatory claim that “zero dollars” raised by ATFU go to fire victims, and that Ms. Gray Thompson is a “scam artist” you failed to conduct any reasonable investigation. As outlined in this letter, even a cursory review of publicly available records listed in Exhibit A to this letter and others such as IRS Form 990s, grant disclosures, and organizational statements on ATFU’s website and in widely circulated press releases—would have made clear

that ATFU has never claimed to distribute cash directly to individual fire survivors but is a service-based organization, a model it has consistently and transparently described in all public-facing materials and media appearances.

Your failure to contact ATFU for clarification or comment before the publication of the Article—despite having ample opportunity and access to verifiable public information—constitutes a glaring omission that supports the finding of reckless disregard for the truth. Had you undertaken even minimal due diligence, the falsity of the “*zero dollars*” and “*scam artist*” assertions would have been immediately apparent. Your failure to do so, combined with the categorical and absolute nature of your statement, demonstrates a deliberate indifference to the truth that meets—and likely exceeds—the legal standard for actual malice.

C. POST-PUBLICATION DISREGARD AND ONGOING MALICE

Your refusal to retract or correct the false statement—despite being notified by Ms. Gray Thompson of its falsity, and being directed to verifiable facts that contradicted your assertion—further supports a finding of actual malice. Ms. Gray Thompson provided a clear explanation of ATFU’s longstanding service-based model, including how funds are distributed through local nonprofit partners to deliver direct support to wildfire survivors which you could have easily verified. This was an opportunity for you to amend or remove the defamatory content. You declined to do so. The false statement remains publicly available, uncorrected and unqualified, despite clear evidence of its falsity. This post-publication conduct is directly relevant to the actual malice inquiry and further underscores your willful indifference to the truth and the reputational harm caused to ATFU.

In short, your actions clearly meet the threshold of reckless disregard for the truth, and as such evidences an “actual malice” exposing you and CTN to liability for defamation *per se* claim for which damages are presumed.

Accordingly, on behalf of our clients, we demand the following:

1. Immediate Removal of Online Defamatory Content and Retraction

Immediately remove all defamatory content, including quotes and comments from CTN platform retracting the defamatory statement posted in the Article including the comment implying that Ms. Gray Thompson is diverting funds raised by ATFU in her bank account. In the retraction you should explain clearly that as a service-based organization that provides only strategic disaster support to fire victims, ATFU does not and cannot pay cash directly to fire victims and never promised to pay cash directly to fire victims.

This demand is not made lightly. The baseless and defamatory accusations have already caused irreparable damage to our clients’ reputation, undermining existing contracts and prospective funders with whom our clients are in a close business relationship, some who are now more reluctant to donate given your defamatory and slanderous statements. This damage is exacerbated by the bias and lack of fairness shown in your continued defaming Ms. Gray Thompson by asserting during the October 13, 2025, community roundabout meeting that she is a “scam artist.”

Ms. Sue Pascoe
Circling the News
October 21, 2025
Page 5

Should you fail to comply with these demands within seven (7) days of receipt of this letter, our clients will have no choice but to pursue all available legal remedies against you and CTN. This includes, but is not limited to, claims for defamation, libel, and interference with contractual and prospective economic advantage seeking injunctive relief, compensatory and punitive damages, and court costs.

2. Preserve, and not alter, delete, or destroy, all physical and electronic documents, materials, information, and data related to this matter.

This preservation obligation includes, but is not limited to all communications, comment logs, and editorial notes related to the defamatory statement including but is not limited to any and all emails, text messages, instant messages, social media posts, and other forms of communication. Such documents and communications must be preserved irrespective of their physical or electronic form, including cloud storage, backup systems, and any other data repositories.

As fellow wildfire survivors, our clients understand the profound loss endured by the Palisades community, and by you personally and they honor the courage it takes to navigate recovery.

That said, we trust that you will recognize the gravity of this situation, act accordingly to correct the considerable harm you have caused and continue to cause, and cease and desist from making or facilitating further false, defamatory, or misleading claims about our clients.

WRIGHT & SUPPLE LLP



Oriet Cohen-Supple

cc: Mary E. Wright, Esq.

EXHIBIT A

NBC News – People whose homes were spared in L.A. wildfires contend with survivor’s guilt (Jan 16 2025): <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/people-whose-homes-were-spared-la-wildfires-contend-survivors-guilt-rcna133478>

Sonoma Magazine – Once the LA Fires Are Out, Survivors Will Need Our Help More Than Ever (Jan 17 2025): <https://www.sonomamag.com/once-the-la-fires-are-out-survivors-will-need-our-help-more-than-ever/>

CNN – ‘Evacuation fatigue’ sets in for Southern Californians yet to return home after wildfires (Jan 18 2025): <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/18/us/california-wildfire-evacuation-fatigue/index.html>

WebMD – Wildfires and Mental Health: Community First, Then Therapy (Jan 22, 2025): <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20250122/wildfires-and-mental-health-community-first-then-therapy>

Los Angeles Times – Insurance commissioner: Wildfire victims should be paid without itemizing lost contents (Feb 8 2025): <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-02-08/insurance-commissioner-wildfire-victims-should-be-paid-without-itemizing-lost-contents>

Los Angeles Times – Donations topped \$650 million, and the question looms: How to best use it for fire recovery? (Feb 9 2025): <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-02-09/donations-topped-650-million-la-fires-recovery>

CBS Los Angeles – Nonprofit connects former wildfire survivors to current survivors | On Your Side (Mar 7, 2025): <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/after-the-fire-usa-nonprofit-wildfire-survivors-palisades-eaton-fire-recovery/>

CBS Los Angeles – Wildfire Resilience Interview at J. Lopez’s Home in Altadena (May 5, 2025): <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/los-angeles-wildfire-survivors-fire-resilient-homes-insurance/>

FOX 11 Los Angeles – Jennifer Gray Thompson discusses After the Fire USA’s rebuilding efforts after the Jan 2025 wildfires (Mar 10 2025): <https://www.foxla.com/video/1606214>

ABC7 Los Angeles – How to make your California home more wildfire resistant (Nov 12, 2024): <https://abc7.com/how-to-make-your-home-more-wildfire-resistant-california/14477657/>

Three Homeless Guys – YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@3HomelessGuys>

Ms. Sue Pascoe
Circling the News
October 21, 2025
Page 7

New York Life – “River of Humanity” Episode Featuring Jennifer Gray Thompson (Series Page):

<https://www.newyorklife.com/newsroom/podcast-love-takes-action>

The Washington Post – California wildfires are driving up home prices, gentrifying the state (Feb 10 2023): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/02/10/california-wildfires-housing-prices-gentrification/>

AP News – They lost everything in the Paradise fire. Now they're reliving their grief as fires rage in Hawaii (Aug 12 2023): <https://apnews.com/article/aa827eabef48d2764aa58d01f7a6969c>

PBS NewsHour – Concerns over ‘climate gentrification’ rise after devastating fire in Maui (Aug 18 2023): <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/concerns-over-climate-gentrification-rise-after-devastating-fire-in-maui-fires>

Mint (India) – Maui fires aftermath: Concerns over ‘climate gentrification’ rise in Hawaii (Aug 18 2023): <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/maui-fires-aftermath-concerns-over-climate-gentrification-rise-in-hawaii-11692356216862.html>

Xinhua – Concerns over ‘climate gentrification’ rise in U.S. Hawaii after devastating Maui fires (AP)(Aug 19 2023): <https://english.news.cn/20230819/6e5f33cb87b841ba9b5162a3c835eb4f/c.html>

Connecticut Public / NPR – What happens after the fire (Interview with Jennifer Gray Thompson) (Aug 19 2023): <https://www.ctpublic.org/2023-08-19/what-happens-after-the-fire>