

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**"JV" - a Minor Child, by and through
his parent,
SANGDUEN TEEKAWONG,**

Plaintiff,

v.

**CBS BROADCASTING INC.,
A New York Corporation,
1515 Broadway, 33rd Floor
New York, NY, 10036**

**SERVE:
CORPORATION SERVICE COMPANY
1156 15TH STREET NW, Suite 605
Washington, DC, 20005,**

and

**CBS INTERACTIVE INC.,
A Delaware Corporation,
1515 Broadway, 33rd Floor
New York, NY, 10036**

**SERVE:
CORPORATION SERVICE COMPANY
251 Little Falls Drive
Wilmington, DE 19808,**

Defendants.

Civil Action No. 26-3576

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

COMPLAINT

COMES now Plaintiff "JV" – a minor child (age 15), by and through his parent (mother), Sangduen Teekawong, and through JV's undersigned counsel, and brings this Complaint for Damages against Defendants CBS Broadcasting Inc. and CBS Interactive Inc. (collectively

referred to herein as “CBS”) due to the false and defamatory statements made against him by the Defendants, which are set forth herein.

INTRODUCTION

This case arises from a national news organization's publication of a false and devastating accusation, which has been viewed at least 1.8 million times, identifying a 15-year-old child as one of five people arrested for vandalizing the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall. Plaintiff "JV" did not vandalize the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool (the “Reflecting Pool”). He was not arrested for vandalizing it. He was not accused by law enforcement of vandalizing it. Yet CBS News broadcast and published a story to a national audience that placed JV's image alongside the assertion that five people had been arrested for vandalizing and "sabotaging" the Reflecting Pool, thereby falsely portraying JV as one of the perpetrators of a highly publicized federal crime.

The accusation was particularly damaging because at all times material to the allegations, the Reflecting Pool renovation and subsequent alleged vandalism of the Reflecting Pool is or has been the subject of intense national attention and political controversy. President Donald Trump frequently discusses (or frequently discussed at all times material to the allegations contained herein) the Reflecting Pool renovation and publicly condemned those accused of vandalism in extraordinarily harsh terms, stating that they should be “prosecuted to the max.” CBS nevertheless inserted JV—a minor who had nothing to do with the report about vandalism—into that controversy and exposed him to extreme embarrassment, humiliation, and the public condemnation and threats directed at the actual people who were arrested for vandalism.

JV's presence near the Reflecting Pool was entirely unrelated to the vandalism. On June 20, 2026, he was riding his electric dirt bike ("e-bike") past the National Mall, as he was riding

home that day from an event in Washington, D.C. and was near the Reflecting Pool only because it was on the way home. Although law enforcement briefly detained and handcuffed him in connection with his use of the e-bike, he was released without charges. His detention had nothing whatsoever to do with vandalism or sabotage of the Reflecting Pool.

CBS nevertheless used video footage of JV's detention in its report about the Reflecting Pool vandalism. As CBS anchor Jericka Duncan told viewers that "five people have been arrested," the video depicted JV in handcuffs. In the version CBS distributed online and through social media, CBS showed JV turning toward the camera with his face fully visible as Duncan made the statement concerning the arrests and then identified one of the alleged perpetrators, David Hearn. The visual and verbal presentation published by Defendants unmistakably conveyed the false message that JV was among the persons arrested for vandalizing the Reflecting Pool and further confused JV with Hearn, an adult who was subsequently indicted on a felony charge arising from the vandalism. Showing JV's face in the online and social media report was a calculated and intentional decision because CBS deliberately edited the TV version of the report to include a clear picture of JV's face looking directly at the camera for the online and social media version.

This was not an error that CBS lacked the means to avoid. The original Freedom News TV video from which CBS obtained the video footage of JV expressly distinguished between a person detained for alleged vandalism and another person detained for using a dirt bike and showed JV standing next to his dirt bike. The reporter who recorded the footage likewise publicly stated that JV was a minor detained because of his dirt bike and was "not near the pool." Thus, information identifying the true circumstances of JV's detention was readily available to

CBS before it published its report. The facts alleged herein demonstrate that CBS either knew its portrayal of JV was false or acted with reckless disregard for whether it was true.

CBS compounded the harm through the manner and breadth of its publication. Although the national television broadcast did not show JV's face, CBS's online and social-media version did. It showed his face immediately after depicting his distinctive sweatshirt and while reporting that arrests had been made. JV was readily recognized by friends and acquaintances. In fact, it was a family friend who first notified JV and/or his family about the report. CBS published the report across Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, where it accumulated at least 1.8 million views, more than 35,000 likes, thousands of comments, and more than a thousand documented shares.

The consequences for JV have been profound. Before CBS's publication, JV was an excellent student and high-school ice hockey player with a sterling reputation among his school, teammates, friends, family, and community. After CBS falsely associated him with a notorious federal vandalism case, numerous friends, teammates, and others contacted him about the report, and friends distanced themselves from him. JV has suffered embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety, loss of sleep, emotional distress, and continuing fear that CBS's false accusation will follow him through high school and affect his college admissions, athletic opportunities, employment, and future career.

The permanence and seriousness of that harm are magnified by JV's age. A 15-year-old child should not enter adulthood burdened by an internet record created by one of the country's largest news organizations falsely portraying him as having been arrested for committing a federal crime against one of the nation's most recognizable landmarks.

CBS ultimately acknowledged the gravity of what it had done. On August 16, 2026, during a CBS Evening News broadcast, Duncan issued a retraction and acknowledged: "We

never should have published this story." CBS's belated acknowledgment, however, cannot undo the publication or erase its consequences. By the time CBS acted, the false story had already been disseminated to an enormous audience and had inflicted substantial and continuing injury upon JV's reputation and emotional well-being.

This action therefore seeks to hold Defendants accountable for the false and defamatory portrayal they created, published, and widely disseminated, and to recover compensatory and punitive damages for the harm their conduct has caused and continues to cause JV.

PARTIES

1. Plaintiff "JV" – a minor child (age 15), is a citizen of the United States who lives with his parents, including his mother, Sangduen Teekawong, in Maryland. He is domiciled in and a citizen of the State of Maryland.
2. Defendant CBS BROADCASTING INC. ("CBS News" or "CBS") is a New York corporation with its principal place of business in New York, New York. CBS BROADCASTING INC. operates within the District of Columbia, at its CBS News bureau at 2020 M St NW, Washington, DC 20036.
3. Defendant CBS INTERACTIVE INC. ("CBS Interactive" or also "CBS") is a Delaware corporation with its principal place of business in New York, New York. CBS INTERACTIVE INC. engages in business in the District of Columbia. CBS INTERACTIVE INC. provides information and entertainment with a global reach, and manages a vast portfolio of digital properties, including the web-based platform and content for CBS News. Through such, CBS INTERACTIVE INC. actively distributes web-based content to viewers who live within the District of Columbia.
4. CBS BROADCASTING INC. and CBS INTERACTIVE INC. (collectively, "CBS") collectively operate a media organization with global reach that broadcasts news stories,

chiefly through CBS News. As is relevant to this case, CBS's programming portfolio includes the CBS Evening News, which is broadcast nightly during the week as well as on weekends, throughout the United States, from its studio in New York as well as at times, from its studio within the District of Columbia.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

5. This Court possesses subject matter jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1332, based upon the diversity of citizenship between the parties. The amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000, exclusive of costs and interest.
6. This Court possesses personal jurisdiction over each Defendant because during the operative period alleged in this Complaint, each Defendant transacted business in the District of Columbia, contracted to supply services in the District of Columbia, caused tortious injury in the District of Columbia by acts or omissions in the District of Columbia, and/or caused tortious injury in the District of Columbia by acts or omissions outside the District of Columbia while regularly doing or soliciting business, engaging in a persistent course of conduct, or deriving substantial revenue from goods, services, or publications used or consumed in the District of Columbia.
7. Venue is proper in this Court under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) because a substantial part of the events giving rise to this action occurred in the District of Columbia, including the filming of Plaintiff without his consent, the subject matter of the defamatory report, the

publication of the report to viewers and readers in the District of Columbia, and the operation of CBS News activities directed to and within the District of Columbia.

FACTS

8. Plaintiff JV is a 15-year-old high school student in Maryland. On Saturday, June 20, 2026, Plaintiff rode his electric dirt bike ("e-bike") past the National Mall, as he was riding home that day from an event in Washington, D.C. and was near the Reflecting Pool only because it was on the way home.
9. Plaintiff did not get into the Reflecting Pool on the Mall and he did not vandalize the Pool.
10. Despite this, on June 21, 2026, CBS News, on its national Evening News show with anchor Jericka Duncan, presented a story which falsely asserted that JV was arrested for engaging in vandalism towards the Reflecting Pool.
11. While the version of this story on the national Evening News did not show JV's face, it showed video of him from the rear while he was briefly handcuffed, and he was readily identifiable because of his hair and because of the distinctive nature of the logo on the black hoodie that he was wearing (which he routinely wears and is known to wear).
12. On or about the same day, CBS News published on its social media accounts (and upon information and belief, also on its own web site) the same story, with certain modifications. In this version of CBS's story, anchor Duncan stated as follows:

"President Trump is accusing vandals of sabotaging the \$14 million renovation on the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. So far, **five people have been arrested, among them a three-time Olympian and cyclist David Hearn, who was taken into custody after touching the pool's detached liner.**"
13. While Ms. Duncan was speaking those words, the video showed a young man (Plaintiff JV) from behind, handcuffed, in a black sweatshirt with a very distinctive

logo on the back. The video then showed JV (with his face fully visible) turning around, just as the phrase “So far, **five people have been arrested....**” While JV’s face was shown, Ms. Duncan then said – “**among them a three-time Olympian and cyclist David Hearn....**” Screenshots from the video are provided below.¹

[SCREENSHOTS 1 AND 2 REDACTED]

14. This allegation was false. It was also defamatory *per se* as through such, CBS falsely asserted that JV had been arrested and that he had committed the criminal offense of vandalism on Federal property. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 1361 (providing, “Whoever willfully injures or commits any depredation against any property of the United States, or of any department or agency thereof, or any property which has been or is being manufactured or constructed for the United States, or any department or agency thereof, or attempts to commit any of the foregoing offenses, shall be punished as follows: If the damage or attempted damage to such property exceeds the sum of \$1,000, by a fine under this title or imprisonment for not more than ten years, or both; if the damage or attempted damage to such property does not exceed the sum of \$1,000, by a fine under this title or by imprisonment for not more than one year, or both.”).
15. CBS had no reasonable basis to believe that Plaintiff had committed any crime, to include any act of vandalism. He had not done so. Moreover, CBS presented the story in a way that asserted that JV had been arrested for engaging in such conduct. That was false, as he was not arrested for that or for any other charged offense.

¹ Plaintiff is filing the publicly available version of the Complaint in redacted form, to include the redaction of key images that are referenced below, which show JV in handcuffs from behind and which also show his face. Plaintiff will promptly file a motion for leave to file under seal an unredacted version thereof, and further, for leave to file copies of the videos published by Defendants which are at issue.

16. Several facts demonstrate that CBS acted willfully and with malice towards JV by publishing this false story about him. In publishing this story, CBS either knew that it was false or alternatively, it acted with reckless disregard for the truth thereof.
17. The Reflecting Pool renewal and vandalism is frequently discussed by the President of the United States, Donald Trump. President Trump has spoken directly about the alleged vandals referenced in the CBS story, and has stated that such people (including JV, according to CBS) are "Deranged Vandals," "animals," and "Scum" who should be "prosecuted to the max."
18. JV is not an animal, deranged vandal, or scum. He is a normal 15-year-old high school student who was dragged into this horrific spotlight by the reckless reporting of CBS.
19. The false CBS story is deeply offensive, has significantly affected JV emotionally, and has done immutable damage to his reputation, which was previously spotless. He is now burdened with dealing with this false assertion for the rest of his life, including with respect to friends, high school, family, colleges, and jobs.
20. This is not an instance of an innocuous mistake or bad judgment by CBS. The report has been viewed at least 1.8 million times on CBS Evening News' social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Additionally, the report has received tens of thousands of comments, likes, and shares.
21. Nor is this a typical report about vandalism. As noted, this is a highly controversial and viral story that has received massive media coverage and public interest based upon its frequent discussion by President Trump.
22. These false and defamatory publications continued to be published by CBS Evening News on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, until on or about August 6, 2026. These

platforms are some of the most popular social media platforms for young people of JV's age group, which exacerbated the damage caused by CBS's reckless conduct.

23. The total number of views at this time is at least 1.8 million. The table below shows the total views and engagement as of July 24, 2026, and reflects the report's popularity and widespread dissemination:

	Views	Comments	Likes	Bookmarks	Shares
Facebook	971,000	5,500	13,200	Unknown	673
TikTok	574,200	2,345	19,300	1143	740
Instagram	259,000	1,636	3,069	Unknown	96
TOTAL	1,804,200	9,481	35,569	1143 (known)	1,509

The links to the report, prior to their being taken down, are noted below.²

24. JV was not arrested, detained, or accused of vandalizing or sabotaging the Reflecting Pool. Although he was detained and briefly handcuffed, his detention related to a completely different issue than the CBS story. He was briefly detained and questioned for riding an e-bike near the Reflecting Pool and was later released without any charges. His detention had nothing to do with the CBS story about people being arrested for vandalizing the Reflecting Pool.
25. Furthermore, JV is not David Hearn (who is reportedly over 60 years old) and referencing Hearn's name while JV was shown in the video misrepresented his identity. This was severely damaging to JV, as Mr. Hearn was ultimately indicted on a felony criminal

² Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1004021325342236>; TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@cbseveningnews/video/7654046601127791886? r=1& t=ZT-97UmWgu9Iqs>; Instagram: [CBS Evening News on Instagram](#).

charge relating to vandalizing the Reflecting Pool on July 2, 2026, and faced 10 years in jail. The indictment continued to be a major news story for several weeks. It received a significant amount of national media coverage when it occurred, including a press release and conference by U.S. Attorney, Jeanine Pirro.

26. According to Ms. Pirro: "Vandalism at treasured places like the Reflecting Pool is an affront to our shared history and the dignity of our national heritage. These monuments belong to all of us, and we will protect them—and hold accountable those who seek to deface or diminish them."
27. As reported by CBS Evening News, Ms. Pirro referred to the Reflecting Pool as a "national resource, a national treasure" during her press conference regarding the indictment for vandalism. President Trump, when discussing the Reflecting Pool vandals, stated that "These are very serious crimes having to do with the destruction of National Monuments. Years in jail!"
28. To falsely assert that JV was one of five people arrested for vandalizing the Reflecting Pool is extremely irresponsible, grossly negligent, and highly damaging to JV's reputation. It is unclear why CBS did not use an image of Mr. Hearn in the report when, unlike JV, Mr. Hearn was the actual subject of the report and was arrested for vandalizing the Reflecting Pool.
29. Because CBS showed JV's face immediately after it showed the back of his sweatshirt with the distinctive logo at issue (through the version of the story that it posted on its website and on its social media accounts), numerous people readily identified him in the video. The referenced logo on the back of JV's sweatshirt is for the clothing line – "unmanageable." This logo and clothing featuring it are very popular among young

people who ride e-bikes, which JV does. His friends and acquaintances readily recognized him based upon this sweatshirt, which he frequently wears. His identity was fully confirmed once CBS showed his face in the video, after he turned around.

30. Numerous individuals, including JV's friends, teammates, classmates, and acquaintances, identified JV from the CBS report. JV was contacted by multiple friends and teammates about the report. In fact, JV and/or his family first learned about the CBS report from a family friend. The fact that viewers readily identified JV demonstrates the report was "of and concerning" him within the meaning of D.C. defamation law.
31. CBS's report sent a false and damaging message concerning JV, as it falsely asserted – through the words spoken by Ms. Duncan concurrently with the video footage of him – that he was one of "five people who have been arrested" and further presented him as being Mr. Hearn.
32. CBS acted with malice when presenting this video. Indeed, on August 16, 2026, during a broadcast of CBS Evening News, Ms. Duncan issued a retraction, and stated in part: "We never should have published this story." CBS's acknowledgment of wrongdoing and its apology does not serve to negate the willful nature of its wrongful and defamatory acts towards JV based upon several factors.
33. The video clip that CBS used is from a longer video that was first posted by Freedom News TV on YouTube on June 20, 2026 (one day before CBS Evening News published its story). Immediately underneath the video that it had posted, Freedom News TV accurately stated – **"One DETAINED at Reflecting Pool for Alleged Vandalism, another for using Dirt Bike - Washington DC."**

34. Based upon this, CBS News knew that JV was not arrested or otherwise detained for suspected vandalism at the time that it published its false stories about him, or it acted with reckless disregard for the truth thereof. Upon information and belief, FreedomNews TV communicated this and other information to CBS when CBS licensed the video from it, to accurately explain that JV was not arrested or otherwise detained for alleged vandalism.
35. Furthermore, the X account of the person who shot the video that was first posted by Freedom News TV and licensed to CBS (Amanda Moore) stated in a June 21 (2026) tweet that JV is "a minor who was taken in because of his dirt bike. He was not near the pool." That reporter also knew that JV's bike was impounded. This is information that CBS's personnel either knew, or should have known, prior to publicizing the false and defamatory story about JV.
36. Additionally, the fact that CBS, in its national Evening News broadcast, did not show JV's face – but then edited the video in a manner to specifically show his face in the version of the story that it published on its website and on its social media accounts – further demonstrates that it intended to cause harm to JV by ensuring that his identity would be known, as it falsely accused him of having been among those arrested for vandalism on the Reflecting Pool. Those deliberate actions by CBS had their intended effect. As one commenter (Stephanie Rose Johnson) to the CBS report posted on TikTok stated, "those kids looking right at the camera 😂." The laughing emoji with tears is commonly used to express that something is extremely funny, hilarious, or brings intense amusement. Ironically, a subsequent commenter (One Day at a Time) stated: "Why don't you report the truth?"

37. The defamatory meaning arose from the juxtaposition of audio and visual elements. As anchor Duncan stated "five people have been arrested," the video simultaneously showed JV in handcuffs. In the online version, the video then showed JV's face while Duncan continued, "among them a three-time Olympian and cyclist David Hearn." The sequential presentation – showing JV's distinctive sweatshirt, then his face, then naming David Hearn – created the unmistakable impression that JV was both (1) one of the five arrested persons and (2) either was David Hearn or was connected to him. Because television viewers understand audio and visual elements together, the average viewer would reasonably interpret this presentation as identifying JV as arrested for vandalism. CBS affirmatively intended this interpretation by editing the footage to show JV's face in the online version after deliberately excluding his face from the broadcast version.
38. The defamatory meaning is established by the audio-visual presentation as a whole, not merely the spoken words. Showing JV in handcuffs while stating "five people have been arrested" conveys the clear message that JV was one of those five, regardless of whether his name was spoken.
39. CBS News acted with malice towards JV in publishing this false and defamatory story. It either knew that the story was false when publishing it, or alternatively, it acted with reckless disregard for the truth thereof.
40. CBS's report falsely accused JV of having committed the criminal offense of vandalism and engaging in sabotage in relation to the Reflecting Pool, to include being arrested for such offense, which was defamatory *per se*, for which damages are presumed.
41. Furthermore, this is not a typical accusation of vandalism. In addition to moral turpitude, the CBS accusation about JV involves a serious allegation that JV is a political activist

who engaged in an act of political sabotage directed against the President of the United States. The Reflecting Pool is an iconic landmark that has become a centerpiece of President Trump's efforts to revitalize Washington, D.C. Vandalizing the Reflecting Pool has been equated with an attack against President Trump. It is an extremely heated subject for both Trump supporters and detractors.

42. The CBS News report goes beyond mere vandalism and falsely asserts, either directly or by implication, that JV is a political operative who was acting against the President of the United States, his millions of supporters, and potentially even America.
43. A small sample of the comments to President Trump's post on Truth Social about this issue show immense hatred for the vandals. The comments call the vandals "PURE EVIL!" "unhinged and deranged," and state that "These sick lunatics vandalizing the Reflecting Pool need to be slapped with major federal charges!" In addition to those characterizations, the comments use numerous other derogatory names towards the alleged vandals, including: traitor, domestic terrorist, anarchist, monster, sick, loser, thug, lowlife, left wing radical, low IQ, monster, paid Obama activist, and pissant. Several comments also call for the faces of the vandals to be shown, which CBS deliberately did in the social media version: "Blast their pictures across the TV"; "Prosecute those thugs and show their faces with names everywhere"; "They should be blackballed (publish their names online!) heavily fined and incarcerated ☹️" Furthermore, one comment noted that the alleged vandals do "not deserve to live in our country" and one called for the "death penalty for those terrorists."
44. This is an extremely controversial and high-profile story, and one in which CBS traded the truth for clicks and profit at the expense of JV. In fact, a CBS affiliate in Syracuse,

New York, did an entire report on why this is such a controversial issue of such intense public interest. The report states that this is "one of the most talked about controversies in Washington" and "the story of Washington's most famous pool is far from over."

45. JV takes pride in America. The false assertion that he was arrested for vandalizing and sabotaging an iconic national landmark where, among other things, Martin Luther King gave his legendary "I Have a Dream" speech, is in direct contrast to his personality and is extremely damaging to his reputation.
46. JV's reputation and his relationships with his peers have been damaged by CBS's wrongful and reckless conduct. He has been contacted by numerous friends, teammates (as he is an ice hockey player), and others regarding this incident, and friends have distanced themselves from him as a result of CBS's false report.
47. JV has suffered extreme embarrassment, humiliation, emotional distress, loss of sleep, and anxiety as a result of this situation.
48. JV is a rising sophomore in high school in Maryland, where he plays ice hockey. Prior to the CBS report, he maintained a sterling reputation. He is an excellent student with a bright future and has demonstrated model behavior at school and in the community. This false story is extremely damaging to the reputation that he has built for himself.
49. JV is extremely anxious that this false and defamatory accusation will continue to follow him and further damage his reputation.
50. JV is also extremely worried that this false accusation will be seen by admissions and recruiting personnel from colleges and universities that he is interested in attending, that he will have to answer questions relating to such when he pursues college admission, and that the damaging impact of this false allegation will harm his ability to be admitted to

the schools that he most wants to attend. He also is worried about the story's impact on his future job prospects and career paths.

51. JV has his whole life ahead of him, including all the typical issues that come with growing up. He should not have to worry about a false accusations of moral turpitude and political sabotage made by a major news network that has been widely disseminated as part of a highly charged and controversial political issue.
52. The online publications remained accessible and searchable on the internet at least through approximately August 6, 2026, causing continuing and permanent harm to JV's reputation. Even after CBS removed the posts from its social media accounts in August 2026, upon information and belief, cached versions, screenshots, and third-party reposts continued to circulate for some time thereafter. The permanent nature of internet publication magnifies the harm, particularly given JV's age and the likelihood this false accusation will appear in searches of his name for years to come.
53. The severe damage caused to JV's reputation and to him, emotionally, is ongoing.

JV IS A PRIVATE FIGURE

54. JV is a private figure who has never sought public attention, held public office, or voluntarily participated in any public controversy. JV's brief detention for riding an e-bike was unrelated to the Reflecting Pool vandalism and did not make him a participant in that controversy. JV took no action to inject himself into public debate about the Reflecting Pool or any other matter of public concern. JV is therefore a private individual for purposes of this defamation action.

COUNT I
DEFAMATION
(Against all Defendants)

55. Plaintiff incorporates all preceding allegations as if fully stated herein.
56. On and after June 21, 2026, Defendants CBS BROADCASTING INC. and CBS INTERACTIVE INC., directly and/or through their employees, agents, producers, editors, social-media personnel, website personnel, executives, contractors, and other representatives, published false and defamatory statements concerning JV through multiple formats: (a) the national CBS Evening News broadcast; (b) online video published on the CBS News website; and (c) posts on CBS News social-media platforms.
57. Each publication and republication constitutes a separate publication. The defamatory statements were communicated through broadcast television, internet publication, and social-media platforms to at least 1.8 million viewers and readers.
58. In the broadcast version, anchor Duncan stated: "President Trump is accusing vandals of sabotaging the \$14 million renovation on the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. So far, five people have been arrested, among them a three-time Olympian and cyclist David Hearn, who was taken into custody after touching the pool's detached liner."
59. While Ms. Duncan was speaking those words, the video showed Plaintiff JV from behind, handcuffed, in a black sweatshirt with a very distinctive logo on the back. While JV's face was not visible in the version of the story that was published during the CBS Evening News, it was of and concerning him as he was readily identifiable in the video that it showed in the broadcast.

60. On or about the same day, CBS News published on its social media accounts (and upon information and belief, also on its own web site) the same story, with certain modifications. In this version of CBS's story, anchor Duncan stated as follows:
- “President Trump is accusing vandals of sabotaging the \$14 million renovation on the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. So far, **five people have been arrested**, among them **a three-time Olympian and cyclist David Hearn, who was taken into custody after touching the pool’s detached liner.**”
61. While Ms. Duncan was speaking those words, the video showed a young man (Plaintiff JV) from behind, handcuffed, in a black sweatshirt with a very distinctive logo on the back. The video then showed JV (with his face fully visible) turning around, just as the phrase “So far, **five people have been arrested....**” While JV’s face was shown, Ms. Duncan then said – “**among them a three-time Olympian and cyclist David Hearn....**”
62. This allegation was false. It was also defamatory *per se* as through such, CBS falsely asserted that JV had been arrested and that he had committed the criminal offense of vandalism on Federal property.
63. Through this story and the images of JV that were shown, CBS falsely accused JV of having been arrested for vandalism of the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall. Vandalizing the Reflecting Pool has been equated with an attack on America and against President Trump. It is an extremely heated subject for both Trump supporters and detractors.
64. The CBS News report goes beyond a mere allegation of vandalism and falsely asserts, either directly or by implication, that JV is a political operative who was acting against the President of the United States and potentially even America.

65. These allegations are false. JV did not vandalize the Reflecting Pool, and he was not arrested for such or accused of such by police authorities. JV also is not anti-American, not a political saboteur, and has never engaged in an attack on America.
66. The statements are defamatory *per se* because they falsely accuse JV of a crime. Vandalism of the Reflecting Pool would constitute a crime under 18 U.S.C. § 1361.
67. Because the false statements accused JV of a crime, they are defamatory *per se* under D.C. law. Damages to JV's reputation are therefore presumed without proof of special harm.
68. The statements were published without privilege.
69. Defendants were at least negligent in publishing the false statements about JV. Defendants failed to conduct a reasonable investigation before publication even though the source material for the video identified that one person had been detained for alleged vandalism and another person had been detained for using a dirt bike. The reporter who filmed the footage also publicly stated that JV was a minor taken in because of his dirt bike and that he was not near the pool.
70. Defendants' failure to investigate reasonably available facts constitutes negligence.
71. Alternatively, Defendants acted with actual malice. Defendants either knew the statements about JV were false or acted with reckless disregard for their truth. The source material and the reporter's contemporaneous statement directly contradicted CBS's portrayal of JV as arrested for vandalism, yet Defendants published and distributed the report anyway. While JV's face was not visible in the version of the story that was published during the CBS Evening News, it was of and concerning him as he was readily identifiable in the video that it showed in the broadcast. Moreover, CBS specifically

edited the video that it posted on its social media sites to show his face in conjunction with the false message that he was one of five arrested for vandalism. This further demonstrates CBS's actual malice against JV.

72. CBS's decision to edit the online and social-media version to show JV's face—after the broadcast version did not show his face—further demonstrates conscious disregard of the truth and the foreseeable harm to JV. The publication showed JV's face while reporting that five people had been arrested and while identifying David Hearn, thereby creating the false impression that JV was one of the persons arrested for vandalizing the Reflecting Pool.
73. CBS's subsequent retraction, in which anchor Duncan acknowledged that CBS "never should have published this story," further supports the inference that Defendants knew, learned, ratified, or consciously disregarded the falsity of the publication and the harm it caused to JV.
74. Such conduct satisfies the actual malice standard.
75. These false and defamatory statements have caused damage to JV's reputation. They have also caused JV to suffer significant emotional distress, including anxiety, loss of sleep, worry, embarrassment and humiliation, and fear that the false accusation will affect his education, athletics, college admissions, employment, and future career.
76. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' conduct, Plaintiff seeks an award of compensatory damages against Defendants CBS BROADCASTING INC. and CBS INTERACTIVE INC., jointly and severally.
77. Plaintiff also seeks an award of punitive damages against Defendants, jointly and severally, because Defendants acted with actual malice, including with knowledge of

falsity or reckless disregard for the truth, and because Defendants' conduct was willful, malicious, reckless, and in conscious disregard of JV's rights and reputation.

COUNT II
VIOLATION OF PRIVACY – FALSE LIGHT
(Against All Defendants)

78. Plaintiff incorporates the preceding paragraphs 1 through 54 as if fully stated herein.
79. On and after June 21, 2026, Defendant CBS BROADCASTING INC., first through its national CBS Evening News broadcast, and also through the story that it posted through Defendant CBS INTERACTIVE INC. on its website and social media accounts, falsely accused JV, either directly or by implication, of being arrested for vandalism on the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall.
80. Vandalizing the Reflecting Pool has been equated with an attack on America and against President Trump. It is an extremely heated subject for both Trump supporters and detractors. The CBS News' report goes beyond a mere allegation of vandalism and falsely asserts, either directly or by implication, that JV is a political activist who was acting against the President of the United States and potentially even America.
81. These allegations are false. JV did not vandalize the Reflecting Pool, and he was not arrested for such or accused of such by police authorities. JV also is not anti-American and has never engaged in an attack on America.
82. These allegations were also broadly publicized by CBS, first through its national Evening News broadcast and also then through its story that it posted on its web site and on its social media platforms.
83. These allegations were of and concerning JV. Although the video shown by CBS on hits national Evening News did not show JV's face, he was readily identifiable in the video

based upon his hair, based upon the distinctive logo on the back of his hoodie that was shown, and based upon the fact that his e-bike was also shown (next to him).

84. Moreover, as explained above, through the version of this story that CBS published on its social media sites, it specifically edited the video to show JV's face.
85. The false manner in which JV was portrayed to the public by CBS through these stories would also be highly offensive to a reasonable, ordinary person.
86. In presenting JV in this false, misleading, and highly offensive manner, Defendants acted with malice towards him, as they knew that the allegations against him were false at the time that it made them or alternatively, it acted with reckless indifference to the truth thereof.
87. The false and misleading manner in which Defendants presented JV has caused damage to JV's reputation. Such wrongful conduct by Defendants also caused JV to suffer significant emotional distress, including anxiety, loss of sleep, worry, embarrassment and humiliation, and fear that the false accusation will affect his education, athletics, college admissions, employment, and future career.
88. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' conduct, Plaintiff seeks an award of compensatory damages against Defendants CBS BROADCASTING INC. and CBS INTERACTIVE INC., jointly and severally.
89. Plaintiff also seeks an award of punitive damages against Defendants because they acted with actual malice, including with knowledge of falsity or reckless disregard for the truth, and because Defendants' conduct was willful, malicious, reckless, and in conscious disregard of JV's rights and reputation.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff JV respectfully requests that the Court enter Judgment in his favor and against Defendants CBS BROADCASTING INC. and CBS INTERACTIVE INC., jointly and severally, and award Plaintiff the following relief:

- a. Compensatory damages in an amount to be determined by the jury, in excess of \$10,000,000;
- b. Punitive damages in an amount to be determined by the jury, in excess of \$10,000,000;
- c. Post-judgment interest, at the statutory rate, for the amount of damages awarded to Plaintiff;
- d. The costs of bringing this action; and
- e. Any other relief which the Court deems to be fair and just.

Dated: October 13, 2026

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ John B. Flood

John B. Flood (D.C. Bar No. 500069)
Flood Law LLC
2600 Tower Oaks Blvd, Suite 290
Rockville, MD 20852
Tel.: (240) 403-2619
john@fmlaw.org
anthony@fmlaw.org
mary@fmlaw.org
Counsel for Plaintiff