

June 5, 2020

Philadelphia Mayor James F. Kenney
Philadelphia Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw
Philadelphia City Council

Dear Mayor Kenney, Commissioner Outlaw and the Philadelphia City Council:

Over the course of several days, we have witnessed and documented multiple instances of police violence. This has included unlawful arrests of journalists and protesters who are documenting the civic demonstrations within Philadelphia.

We, the collective media of Philadelphia, representing digital, broadcast and print journalists, join with national press-freedom, civil-rights and social-justice groups to ask you to acknowledge these unprovoked acts of violence and denounce the tactics police have used that suppress and infringe upon our constitutional rights and protections under the First Amendment.

Since these protests began:

- A WHYY reporter was arrested for covering a protest in Center City.
- A Pulitzer Prize-winning *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter was arrested for walking to her car after curfew despite the press exemption and protection within the city's COVID-19 and curfew orders.
- An independent journalist was shot by rubber bullets while lawfully recording on public property.

After her arrest, Kristen Graham, a veteran *Inquirer* journalist who won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service, said, "I am a born and bred Philadelphian, an *Inquirer* journalist for the past two decades. ... I've never experienced anything quite like what I saw Monday. I'm still not sure how to explain it to my children."

These instances of violence speak to a troubling national trend of police violence toward the press, from the unlawful arrest of CNN reporter Omar Jimenez in Minneapolis to the police attack on Australian journalists in Washington, D.C.

There is stress in our communities stemming from decades of systemic oppression and silence from elected leaders. The challenges that arise for law enforcement when Philadelphia residents assert their right to assemble in no way justifies police violence toward the press and others who enact their protected rights to document and record these protests.

Our laws give us protection to report and document what is happening in our city and across the country. Our laws give us the right to talk to the public, hold police accountable for their actions and ask questions that shed light and give context that inform the public.

As elected leaders, you are sworn to uphold our rights. We, the undersigned, call on you to do the following:

- Immediately end the practice of arresting journalists and protesters expressing their First Amendment rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom to peacefully assemble.
- Immediately release anyone who's been detained for exercising those protected rights and drop any related charges.
- Immediately release any newsgathering materials taken from journalists and protesters, and cease pressuring journalists to hand over newsgathering materials and footage.
- Issue a public statement affirming these First Amendment rights and assert that members of the press and the public have a right to record police activity and public protests.
- Publicly commit to transparency in all interactions with the press; this includes publicizing arrests, residents detained and charges issued.
- Publicly reinforce the fact that police officers and members of the National Guard do not have the right to unlawfully arrest and detain members of the press or protesters who are recording or otherwise documenting demonstrations within the city.

Signed,

Free Press
Movement Alliance Project
Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists

ACLU of Pennsylvania
Asian American Journalists Association – Philadelphia
Bonfire Media Collective
Boston Institute for Nonprofit Journalism
Common Cause
Common Cause Pennsylvania
Doc Society / Good Pitch Local Philly
Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR)
Freedom of the Press Foundation
G-Town Radio
Generocity
Germantown Info Hub
Globalvision
Government Accountability Project
Green Philly
Independence Public Media Foundation
Kensington Voice

KYW News Radio
Media Alliance
Media in the Public Interest
Media, Inequality & Change Center
National Association of Hispanic Journalists – Philadelphia
National Coalition Against Censorship
National Press Photographers Association
The NewsGuild
The NewsGuild of New York
Online News Association
Open Media Foundation
PEN America
Philadelphia Citizen
Philadelphia Inquirer
Philadelphia Local | SAG-AFTRA
Philadelphia Neighborhoods
Philadelphia Weekly
PhillyCAM
Philly Your Black News
Public News Service/Keystone State News Connection
Reporters Without Borders USA
Society of Professional Journalists
Student Press Law Center
Technically Media
The Temple News
Temple University Television Station
Temple Update
Thomas Jefferson University Communication Program
Tully Center for Free Speech
WHIP Radio
WHYY
Writers Guild of America, East

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Sources:

WHYY Reporter Arrested While Covering Philadelphia Protest

<https://whyy.org/articles/whyy-reporter-arrested-while-covering-philadelphia-protest/>

Tear Gas, Then Handcuffs: I am an *Inquirer* Journalist Who Was Arrested for Doing My Job

<https://www.inquirer.com/news/george-floyd-protests-philadelphia-journalist-arrested-kristen-graham-20200602.html>

Journalists Covering George Floyd Protests Face Attacks from Police

<https://6abc.com/journalists-covering-george-floyd-protests-face-attacks-from-police/6226798/>