

Dear Mayor Kenney, City Council members, and Commissioner Outlaw:

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 from 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

Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists

Asian American Journalists Association - Philadelphia

Movement Alliance Project

National Association of Hispanic Journalists - Philadelphia

ACLU of Pennsylvania

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 Coalition Against Censorship

National Press Photographers Association

The NewsGuild

The NewsGuild of New York

Online News Association

Open Media Foundation  
PEN America  
Pen & Pencil Club  
Philadelphia Citizen  
Philadelphia Inquirer  
Philadelphia Local | SAG-AFTRA  
Philadelphia Weekly  
Philadelphia Neighborhoods  
Philly Your Black News  
Pen & Pencil Club  
PhillyCAM  
Public News Service/Keystone State News Connection  
Reporters Without Borders USA  
Society of Professional Journalists  
Student Press Law Center  
Technically Media  
Temple University Television Station  
Temple Update  
The Temple News  
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-jouranlist-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/>