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*Affiliations appear only
for purposes of identification.*

July 14, 2016

Hon. Frank G. Jackson
Mayor, City of Cleveland
Cleveland City Hall
601 Lakeside Ave
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Calvin D. Williams
Chief of Police
Cleveland Division of Police
1300 Ontario St.
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

Dear Mayor Jackson and Chief Williams:

The undersigned coalition of media organizations writes to urge the City to allow credentialed members of the news media to possess and, if necessary, wear gas masks when covering the Republican National Convention in Cleveland. These items are currently forbidden under Section III.B.(17) of the “Official Event Zone Permit Regulations.”

We propose that, rather than changing the Permit Regulations or formally writing a new policy, the City and its police department leaders simply instruct line officers that credentialed journalists should not be stopped for possessing gas masks and the journalists’ masks should not be confiscated. Philadelphia police, for example, have said that they will not restrict the use of gas masks during the Democratic National Convention, and do not intend to use tear gas.

If law enforcement officers decide to use tear gas on a crowd, that becomes a newsworthy event warranting media attention. Allowing journalists to be present and witness the events benefits everyone involved, including the police. The journalists who are not interfering with police operations and are simply trying to cover the event should be permitted to protect themselves, and should not be forced to try to cover such activity while suffering the sting of tear gas.

In addition, because these restrictions are contained in a document about permitted parades and protests, we worry that not all journalists will see the restriction on gas masks. They should not be detained or have to forfeit that property because they didn’t see the policy. It is self-evident that almost all of the other restricted items would not be allowed. But reporters and photographers who are taking routine measures to protect themselves should not be penalized.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
American Society of News Editors
The Associated Press
Association of Alternative Newsmedia
Bloomberg L.P.
Cable News Network, Inc.
Chicago Tribune Company LLC
Dow Jones & Company, Inc.
The E.W. Scripps Company
Fox News Network LLC
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Los Angeles Times Communications LLC
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The National Press Club
National Press Photographers Association
National Public Radio, Inc.
The New York Times Company
Newspaper Association of America
Online News Association
Radio Television Digital News Association
Reuters America LLC
TEGNA Inc.
The Washington Post

cc: Dan Williams
Media Relations Director
Office of the Mayor

Daniel Ball
Assistant Media Relations Director
Office of the Mayor

Sgt. Jennifer Ciaccia
Public Information Officer
Cleveland Division of Police