



Society of Professional Journalists

Greater Los Angeles Chapter

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To: The Honorable David O. Carter, Judge
United States District Court, Central District of California
% Kelly Davis, Courtroom Deputy Clerk
<Kelly_Davis@cacd.uscourts.gov.>

Dear Judge Carter:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Society of Professional Journalists, Greater Los Angeles Pro Chapter, to express our deep concern about your order dated March 23, 2020 in the matter of *LA Alliance For Human Rights et al v. City of Los Angeles et al*, that would limit the number of people permitted to attend the settlement conference scheduled for March 24, 2020.

While we are fully cognizant and respectful of federal, state, local, and judicial directives that limit public gatherings and require a prescribed measure of "social distancing" to ensure public safety in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, these considerations in no way preclude the attendance of one or more media representatives at important meetings of public officials conducting the public's business. There is neither need nor precedent for suspending open government and transparency laws in this type of situation, and it is our firm belief that the severe harms far outweigh any purported good from such restrictions.

Your order cited as justification "both the epidemiological dangers of the escalating COVID-19 crisis, and the confidential nature of the settlement discussions." Whatever the legal merits of the confidentiality argument, there is no acceptable rationale for completely excluding the press, and therefore the public, on the basis of public safety considerations. Assigning a pool reporter to cover a judicial or other governmental proceeding on behalf of all media is a long established and generally unobjectionable practice, and there is no argument to be made that such a proceeding is at heightened risk from a reporter observing appropriate social distancing, or that the reporter would be at any increased risk from appropriately covering such a proceeding.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you reconsider your proposed ban on media attendance at this settlement conference, and at a minimum, agree to admit at least one pool reporter to represent media and public participation in the conduct of this important public business.

Thank you for your attention to our request.

Respectfully,
Joel Bellman
Chair, Advocacy Committee
Society of Professional Journalists, Greater Los Angeles Pro Chapter
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