

September 15, 2026

Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK)
Chair, Congressional-Executive
Commission on China

Representative Christopher H. Smith
(R-NJ)
Co-Chair, Congressional-Executive
Commission on China

Re: Written statement of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) for hearing, “A Son and Daughter’s Appeal to Xi Jinping to Release Their Dad, Jimmy Lai” – September 16, 2026 – Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)

Dear Chair Sullivan and Co-Chair Smith:

On behalf of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), I write to submit this written statement in support of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China’s September 16, 2026, hearing, “A Son and Daughter’s Appeal to Xi Jinping to Release Their Dad, Jimmy Lai.”

CPJ welcomes this important hearing examining the prolonged imprisonment of Hong Kong media publisher and democracy advocate Jimmy Lai and what his case shows about the erosion of freedom of the press, judicial independence, and the rule of law in Hong Kong.

CPJ further appreciates the Commission’s sustained attention to Lai’s case, the efforts of Congress to secure his release, and the continued solidarity shown to Lai’s family.

CPJ has also previously welcomed President Donald Trump’s pledge to raise Lai’s case with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and to secure his release.

Lai, a British citizen, was sentenced in February 2026 to 20 years in prison on baseless charges of colluding with foreign forces and committing sedition. This sentence is tantamount to life imprisonment for the 78-year-old. Apple Daily, Lai’s pro-democracy newspaper, was forced to cease publication in 2021, ending 26 years of operation, after Hong Kong authorities froze its assets and repeatedly raided its offices.

Lai has been imprisoned since 2020 and has spent much of his detention in solitary confinement. According to his family and lawyers, Lai’s age and the harsh conditions of his confinement, including restricted access to daylight and limited opportunity to exercise, have gravely harmed his health and well-being. Lai reportedly suffers from multiple illnesses, including hypertension, diabetes, and cataracts.

Lai’s imprisonment exemplifies the broader repression of independent journalism and freedom of expression in Hong Kong since Beijing and Hong Kong authorities imposed the sweeping and anti-democratic National Security Law in 2020.

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Committee to Protect Journalists

Since then, the city has seen a dramatic decline in media freedom, with journalists arrested, jailed, and threatened. Hong Kong, which was once a bastion for press freedom in Asia, also saw the closure of numerous media outlets and journalists who quit their jobs or left the city.

Hong Kong is a leading international financial center, home to tens of thousands of U.S. citizens and a base for more than 1,400 U.S. companies. Lai's arbitrary imprisonment also raises serious concerns about the deteriorating state of judicial independence, transparency, and the rule of law there. These developments directly bear on U.S. and international interests in the special administrative region.

CPJ has long advocated for the release of Lai, winner of CPJ's 2021 Gwen Ifill Press Freedom Award. The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the European Union have also called for him to be freed.

China consistently ranks as the world's worst jailer of journalists, with at least 50 journalists currently behind bars, according to CPJ reporting.

In support of Lai's freedom, and in light of his declining health, CPJ submits the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration:

- Issue a bicameral, bipartisan letter to President Trump asking him to raise Lai's case with Xi Jinping during their September 24 summit in Washington, D.C., and to press for Lai's release;
- Condition congressional support for improved bilateral relations with China on Lai's release, as well as the release of all other arbitrarily detained journalists and human rights advocates in mainland China and Hong Kong; and,
- Ensure that the State Department prioritizes Lai's case and leverages all available diplomatic means and opportunities to secure his release.

Lai sacrificed his freedom and fortune to defend democracy and the rule of law in Hong Kong. As a beacon of democracy, the U.S. Congress should resolutely demand Lai's release. His case is a symbol of the struggle for freedom of the press and expression in China and around the world.

Respectfully,

Jodie Ginsberg
CEO, Committee to Protect Journalists