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Lorraine Cochran-Johnson

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June 20, 2025

(Sent via email)

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Press Freedom Center
P.O. Box 2675
New York, NY 10108

Dear Ms. Jacobsen,

Thank you for your letter regarding the arrest of Mr. Mario Guevara during the protest that took place in the Embury Hills area on Saturday, June 14, 2025. I appreciate the work of the Committee to Protect Journalists and your dedication to safeguarding press freedom around the world.

Let me begin by affirming my strong support for the First Amendment and the essential role of journalists in a free and democratic society. As someone who spent over 15 years in media prior to becoming CEO, I deeply understand the responsibility and risk that reporters assume in the pursuit of truth and public service. Journalists are not the enemy — they are critical to keeping the public informed, promoting transparency, and holding power accountable. Yet, it is important to note, members of the press are required to honor all aspects of law when they engage in protests - there is no due pass or immunity given to members of the press due to wearing signage or announcing themselves as members of the press.

I also want to clarify the facts and jurisdictional boundaries in this case. The police presence at the Chamblee-Tucker protest was a multijurisdictional effort, involving officers from four different jurisdictions and agencies. Mr. Guevara was arrested by the Doraville Police Department, an independent agency with its own command structure and prosecutorial oversight. So, DeKalb County Police Department had no role in initiating the charges against him.

Further, as CEO of DeKalb County, I do not possess legal authority to intervene in judicial matters or immigration proceedings. I cannot unilaterally drop charges or influence the decisions of independent law enforcement bodies, the courts, or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). That said, I recognize the emotional gravity of this case, especially for members of our immigrant and press communities, and I understand the fear that can arise when professional duties intersect with legal vulnerability.

My administration continues to conduct a full review of the protest and the responses across jurisdictions. We are working to publish clear guidelines for future demonstrations that balance First Amendment rights, public safety, and lawful protest protocol.

Additionally, we remain in contact with community leaders, including those in media and immigrant advocacy, to foster dialogue and transparency in this difficult moment.

Finally, I want to reiterate that DeKalb County does not participate in ICE enforcement actions and has no role in determining an individual's immigration status or detainment. Any questions regarding Mr. Guevara's ongoing custody should be directed to the Doraville Police Department or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

I remain committed to protecting the rights of protestors, the press, and all residents of DeKalb County — and I welcome continued conversation and partnership with organizations like yours to ensure those rights are protected in both principle and practice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lorraine Cochran Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lorraine" being the most prominent.

Lorraine
Chief
DeKalb County, Georgia

Executive

Cochran-Johnson
Officer