



June 20, 2024

BY EMAIL

District Attorney Jeff Rosen
Office of District Attorney
County of Santa Clara
70 W. Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Arrest of student journalist Dilan Gohill

Dear District Attorney Jeff Rosen:

The First Amendment Coalition and the Student Press Law Center, joined by 24 other organizations dedicated to free speech and freedom of the press, respectfully request that you decline to pursue charges against The Stanford Daily reporter Dilan Gohill, a student journalist arrested while covering a pro-Palestinian protest and occupation of the Stanford University president's office.

Police arrested Gohill, 19, a first-year Stanford student, along with 12 protesters after the university sought a law enforcement response to June 5 demonstrations.¹ Gohill was held in jail for 15 hours and faces charges of felony burglary, vandalism and conspiracy, according to his lawyers² and the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker.³

It is clear to us that Gohill was present to cover the news. As the editorial board of The Stanford Daily explained, Gohill was on assignment and did not plan or participate in the protest in any way.⁴ It is our understanding he did not break into any buildings, vandalize any property or engage in the creation of barricades. In the course of his reporting, Gohill became barricaded inside the building. He identified himself as a reporter, displaying his newspaper-issued press badge and wearing a red Stanford Daily sweatshirt, which visibly distinguished him from protesters who dressed in black. When officers arrived, Gohill told them he was a member of the press, and protesters even told police he was not one of them, an interaction his editors could hear via speakerphone.

Further demonstrating that Gohill was present in his capacity as a journalist, he published breaking news detailing activity inside the building ("Once inside, protestors barricaded doors with bike locks, chains, ladders and chairs and covered security cameras with tin foil," a dispatch on The Daily's website reads.⁵) Gohill's coverage of the events helped inform the

¹ <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2024/06/this-morning-s-occupation-of-building-10>

² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/154LM6-xScTbh-OxWYom1bgrEg7qsXuSi/view>

³ <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/student-journalist-arrested-while-covering-stanford-protest/>

⁴ <https://stanforddaily.com/2024/06/12/letter-from-the-board-on-our-reporters-arrest/>,
<https://stanforddaily.com/2024/06/05/letter-from-the-editors-on-todays-arrests-at-the-presidents-office/>

⁵ <https://stanforddaily.com/2024/06/05/pro-palestine-protesters-occupy-presidents-office/>

campus and broader community of protester demands and conduct, and of the university and law enforcement response.⁶ Given these circumstances, it is difficult to see how charging Gohill with multiple felonies serves the interests of justice, especially because as a journalist reporting on breaking news he lacked the requisite intent for the crimes he is accused of committing.

The Israel-Hamas war and related protest movement is one of the biggest news stories of our time, especially on college campuses. Gohill's specific beat at The Daily is student activism.⁷ Given this dedicated area of coverage, you can understand how this would lead to an emerging journalist's desire to closely follow protester activities, especially activities likely to prompt a law enforcement response.

Based on the circumstances and absence of any criminal motivation, we urge your office to avoid expending significant resources prosecuting a young journalist who was acting in good faith to serve the public's interest in timely coverage of newsworthy events.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ginny LaRoe, advocacy director, First Amendment Coalition (glaroe@firstamendmentcoalition.org), or Mike Hiestand, senior legal counsel, Student Press Law Center (mhiestand@splc.org).

Respectfully,

FIRST AMENDMENT COALITION

STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER

Joined by:

ACLU of Northern California
Asian American Journalists Association, Los Angeles
Associated Collegiate Press
Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists, Los Angeles Chapter
California News Publishers Association
CCNMA Latino Journalists of California
Coalition For Women In Journalism
College Media Association
First Amendment Foundation
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression
Freedom of the Press Foundation
Los Angeles Press Club
Media Alliance
Media Guild of the West, The NewsGuild-CWA Local 39213
National Association of Hispanic Journalists

⁶<https://stanforddaily.com/2024/06/05/live-updates-police-break-window-after-pro-palestine-protesters-take-over-presidents-office/>

⁷ <https://stanforddaily.com/author/dgohill/>

National Press Photographers Association
Orange County Press Club
Radio Television Digital News Association
Society of Environmental Journalists
Society of Professional Journalists
Society of Professional Journalists Northern California Chapter
Society of Professional Journalists, San Diego Pro Chapter
The NewsGuild-CWA Local 39521
Women Press Freedom

CC:

Sandip Patel, Deputy District Attorney, Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office
Jenny Martinez, Provost, Stanford University
Kenny Carter, Assistant Dean of Students, Stanford University
Michael Szeto, Director, Office of Community Standards, Stanford University