

September 24, 2019

Mr. Peter May
Chairman
National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
1100 Ohio Drive, SW, Room 220
Washington, D.C. 20242

Dear Chairman May,

I write to you from the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent non-profit organization that advocates for press freedom worldwide, to express support for a Fallen Journalists Memorial located on federal property in Washington, D.C.

Earlier this year, the Fallen Journalists Memorial Act of 2019 was introduced in both chambers of Congress with bipartisan support. These bills would authorize the Fallen Journalists Memorial Foundation to establish a work in Washington, D.C., “to commemorate the sacrifices made by journalists working as guardians of democracy and for a free and independent press.” The proposal could not have come at a more appropriate time.

One of CPJ’s core priorities is to track attacks on the press around the world. CPJ does this in part by conducting an analysis of the number of journalists killed each year. Our research shows that the environment in which journalists operate is as dangerous as ever.

In 2018, at least 54 journalists [were killed](#) around the world. Thirty-four were singled out for murder in direct reprisal for their work, marking an 88 percent jump from 2017.

Since CPJ began [collecting data](#) in 1992, at least 1,353 journalists have been killed in relation to their work around the world. More than half—at least 868—were targeted for murder. Most others were killed in crossfire or while on dangerous assignment. Disturbingly, CPJ has found that in nine out of 10 cases of murdered journalists, the killers go unpunished.

While journalists in the U.S. are rarely killed, they are not immune to violence. In 2018, four journalists and a media worker were [murdered](#) in an attack on the *Capital Gazette* newspaper in Annapolis, Maryland.

Journalists play a crucial role in democratic society. They provide citizens with reliable information about their communities and other regions of the nation and the world. They depict the impact of conflict and humanitarian

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Committee to Protect Journalists

crises around the globe. They inform social and political debates. They help to hold powerful companies, organizations, and individuals to account.

The killings of journalists therefore not only deprive journalists of their right to life—they threaten the very stability of global society.

A consistent and principled position in defense of press freedom is rooted in U.S. history and foundational legal documents. The 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights—which was echoed by the Declaration of Independence—stated, “That the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments.” The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution later protected the right to freedom of the press from government interference.

By consequence, the U.S. has long been a leader in ensuring robust protections for freedom of the press, both at home and around the world. At a time when press freedom is under serious attack, it is all the more important the U.S. continue to show leadership. To this end, the construction of a Fallen Journalists Memorial would serve several purposes. It would:

- Place freedom of the press in its historical context as a founding value and right of the United States;
- Showcase the importance of an independent press to maintaining democratic society;
- Highlight the bravery that journalists have displayed in the line of duty and in the service of seeking the truth;
- Display to the millions of tourists who visit Washington, D.C., that the U.S. cherishes freedom of the press; and
- Show the families of fallen journalists that the U.S. stands in solidarity with them.

For all of these reasons, CPJ supports a national commemorative to fallen journalists in Washington, D.C.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joel Simon
Executive Director