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September 28, 2020

Sheriff Alex Villanueva
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
Hall of Justice
212 West Temple
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Sheriff Villanueva,

The Radio & Television News Association of Southern California (RTNA) is committed to strengthening working relationships between public agencies and the media. Our Los Angeles-based organization represents radio, television and digital media outlets from as far north as Kern County, and south to the California/Mexico border.

The RTNA's Media Access Committee has reviewed the circumstances surrounding the detention and arrest of radio reporter, Josie Huang from KPCC-FM. The committee is comprised of reporters, producers, managers and media professionals.

The committee viewed video clips, spoke with people who were on the scene, and listened to interviews you gave to TV and radio stations regarding the incident. The committee also consulted with members of both law enforcement and media who were not at the scene but have experience with similar situations.

The committee forwarded the following observations and recommendations to the board of the RTNA. We appreciate your attention to the following:

The committee has concerns about the manner in which Ms. Huang was treated during her arrest. It was clear from the video and from interviews from those who witnessed the event on scene that Ms. Huang posed no threat. The physicality of her detention was unwarranted and is very disturbing.

The committee understands deputies are not necessarily aware of every media outlet, and the mere fact Ms. Huang screamed "I'm with KPCC" and "I'm a reporter" may not have registered with those involved in her detention. RTNA also understands that Ms. Huang did not have a credential from the LA County Sheriff's Department or any other issuing agency.

Nonetheless, in past administrations, it was understood that in the event a member of the media was detained, the Sheriff's Information Bureau (SIB) immediately was notified so that SIB could verify the individual's identity and affiliation. Thus, any misunderstanding on the scene of the conflict between deputies and reporter usually could be rectified on the spot without further consequence.

The committee understands Ms. Huang approached deputies in a manner not recommended for reporters during a state of unrest. It is not suggested a reporter insert themselves into a potentially volatile situation without proper identification or affiliation prominently displayed. This can be in the form of clearly visible press credentials, a mic flag with station logo or vest with PRESS or MEDIA clearly visible. You mentioned 'an order to disperse' was issued though no one in your organization nor you can verify the exact time and manner that notification was supposedly given.

Nonetheless, the moment Ms. Huang identified herself as a member of the media SIB should have been notified. Sergeant Robert Boese and Elizabeth Espinosa were on scene that night and a radio/cell call to either of them easily could have cleared up any confusion.

The committee is working to compile a list of suggested protocols for members of the media who are reporting on protests, rallies and civil unrest. It is our intent to encourage reporters, videographers and field producers to identify themselves more clearly during protests or rallies covered by the media so that, should civil unrest happen, officers can more easily identify members of the media.

The committee understands the evening that Ms. Huang was detained was tense and adding to the frustration was a crowd chanting negative sentiments outside the hospital. But, even under the most stressful situations, law enforcement officials are trained to compartmentalize their personal feelings in favor of de-escalating a situation.

Given that Ms. Huang's identity was verified moments after her detention and she posed no threat, the pursuit of charges were unwarranted.

The RTNA previously has offered media relations training to LASD's rank and file, command and civilian staff. And, the RTNA was eager to implement a Spanish-language training program to augment the number of available Spanish-speaking spokespeople in the field. No action was taken by the department on these initiatives.

In October 2019, the RTNA's board of directors had also had been assured by an assistant sheriff and the department's civilian communications director, in person, that leadership was committed to working with the media.

In 2007, members of the Los Angeles Police Department assaulted a number of journalists, videographers and producers during an immigration rights rally in MacArthur Park. Following that horrific incident, the RTNA was tasked with creating new curricula to help officers, supervisors and command staff with media relations. The results were successful and tangible. The RTNA continues to assist the LAPD with on-site training.

Members of the RTNA's Media Access Committee also have presented media relations training to the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Los Angeles City Fire Department, the California Highway Patrol, and the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The chair of our Media Access Committee is California's only working journalist who is a POST-certified instructor for media relations and crisis communications.

The RTNA stands ready to assist where it can, including training that could help foster better understanding of our role to inform the public and hold public agencies accountable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Little".

Chris Little

President, RTNA

cc: Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Inspector General
Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs