



SUSTAINING MEMBERS

Business Record, Des Moines
Cedar Rapids Gazette
Centerville Iowegian
Cityview, Des Moines
Community Publishing Co., Armstrong
Des Moines Register
Iowa Broadcasters Association
Iowa Cubs
Iowa Newspaper Association
Iowa Public Television
KCCI-TV, Des Moines
KCRG-TV, Cedar Rapids
Meredith Corporation
N'West Iowa REVIEW, Sheldon
Quad-City Times, Davenport
Sioux City Journal
Storm Lake Times
WHO-TV, Des Moines
Woodward Communications Inc.,
Dubuque Telegraph Herald,
Dyersville Commercial, Cascade
Pioneer, Manchester Press, Mount
Vernon-Lisbon Sun, Marion Times,
Anamosa Journal-Eureka, Solon
Economist, North Liberty Leader,
Linn News-Letter

FIRST AMENDMENT MEMBERS

American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa
Ames Daily Tribune
Associated Press, Iowa Bureau
Carroll Daily Times Herald
Burlington Hawk Eye
Rob Davis, Des Moines
David E. Drake, D.O., and Claire
Cumbie-Drake, J.D., Des Moines
Drake University School of Journalism
Greenlee School of Journalism and
Communication, Iowa State University
Harlan News-Advertiser, Harlan Tribune
Indiana-Illinois-Iowa Foundation for
Fair Contracting
Iowa Association for Justice
Iowa Association of School Boards
Iowa Broadcast News Association
Iowa Center for Public Affairs
Journalism, IowaWatch.org
Iowa High School Press Association
Iowa Institute for Public Accountability
KWWL-TV, Waterloo
RAYGUN LLC
School of Journalism and Mass
Communication, University of Iowa
Washington Evening Journal, Fairfield
Ledger, Mount Pleasant News
Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier
David Yepsen, Des Moines

March 4, 2019

Gov. Kim Reynolds
Iowa Capitol

Speaker Linda Upmeyer
Iowa House

Chief Clerk Carmine Boal
Iowa House

President Charles Schneider
Iowa Senate

Secretary Charlie Smithson
Iowa Senate

Greetings:

I write to you on behalf of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council. We are an education and advocacy organization that was established 40 years ago by leaders from across Iowa — business executives, representatives of broadcasting and publishing, attorneys, educators, librarians and open-government advocates — to provide a shared voice on issues affecting open government and government accountability.

There has been much discussion in Iowa in the past two months about the criteria for journalists wanting media credentials to cover proceedings in person of the Iowa Senate, Iowa House and the governor’s press conferences. The questions have arisen over the decision to deny Laura Belin credentials to cover the House from inside the chamber and from the requirements communicated to Ms. Belin that both House and Senate credentials are necessary to participate in the governor’s press conferences in Des Moines.

The Iowa FOI Council is concerned about these decisions. But our concerns are more broad and fundamental than simply the response to Ms. Belin’s request.

Without regard to the editorial views of journalists or their employers, the Council believes Iowa government leaders should be encouraging journalists to cover the important policy discussions, deliberations and decisions by the General Assembly and by the governor — rather than discouraging coverage through arbitrary rules that we believe deny media credentials to legitimate reporters.

At a time when the number of reporters employed by traditional media outlets is declining nationwide, the role being played by non-traditional media is growing in importance. The Iowa Supreme Court was cognizant of this



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fact in 2014 when the Court expanded the definition of news media eligible to cover court proceedings using computers, smart phones and still and video cameras inside Iowa's courtrooms.

Iowa Court Rule 25.1(5) contains the following definition, which we think should guide leaders of the General Assembly and the governor's staff in determining who is eligible for media credentials:

"News media" includes any person who regularly gathers, prepares, photographs, records, writes, edits, reports, or publishes news or information about matters of public interest in any medium and who successfully applies to participate in expanded news media coverage and agrees to comply with all court rules.

The Iowa FOI Council does not believe it is appropriate for decisions about access to the press bench in the House or Senate or to the governor's press conferences at the Capitol to be based on how a reporter's content is distributed, whether the journalist is paid, whether the journalist is supervised by a manager, or whether the journalist writes opinions or produces news analyses as part of his/her journalistic reports.

The controversy that has enveloped Ms. Belin's application for House credentials stands in stark contrast with the tradition of openness to in-depth media coverage that the General Assembly and Iowa's governors, Republicans and Democrats, have long facilitated.

The following undersigned members and friends of the Iowa FOI Council encourage Governor Reynolds, House Speaker Upmeyer, Senate President Schneider, Chief Clerk Boal and Secretary Smithson to immediately revise your policies and practices on media credentials and to begin granting them in ways that are above question and that ensure fairness and equality of access.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and suggestions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail.

Randy Evans
Executive Director

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IowaFOICouncil@gmail.com



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This letter also is signed by the following individuals. Their titles and employers are provided for identification purposes:

Debbie Anselm

Publisher, Quad-City Times

Tony Baranowski

*Director of local media,
Times Citizen Communications, Iowa Falls*

Perry Beeman

Managing editor, Des Moines Business Record

Tory Brecht

News director, Iowa City Press-Citizen

Jason Brummond

Publisher, The Daily Iowan

Doug Calsbeek

Editor, Sioux County Capital-Democrat

Bonnie Campbell

Former Iowa attorney general

Lisa Carponelli

*Associate professor multimedia
communications, Simpson College*

Brian Cooper

*Editorial page editor, Dubuque Telegraph
Herald*

Michael Crumb

Editor, Ames Tribune

John Cullen

Publisher, Storm Lake Times

Amy Duncan

*Publisher/owner, Indianola Independent
Advocate*

John Gaines

Managing editor, Burlington Hawk Eye

Amy Gilligan

Executive editor, Dubuque Telegraph Herald

Shane Goodman

Publisher, Big Green Umbrella Media, Johnston

Kristin Grabinoski

*Owner/publisher, Armstrong Journal, Ringsted
Dispatch, Swea City Herald-Press, Bancroft
Register, West Bend Journal, Graettinger
Times, Ruthven Zipcode, Pocahontas Record
Democrat, Buena Vista County Journal,
Laurens Sun*

Andrew Grove

Assistant news director, KTVO-TV, Ottumwa

Mark Hamilton

*Publisher, Iowa Falls Times-Citizen; general
manager, Ackley World Journal, KIFG radio*



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This letter also is signed by the following individuals. Their titles and employers are provided for identification purposes:

Dodie Hook

Publisher, Akron Hometowneer

W. James Johnson

Owner/Publisher, Kalona News

Sara Konrad Baranowski

Editor, Iowa Falls Times Citizen

Jake Krob

Group publisher, Mount Vernon-Lisbon Sun, Marion Times, Solon Economist, Linn News-Letter, North Liberty Leader, North Johnson County, Marion Today

Zack Kucharski

Executive editor, Cedar Rapids Gazette

Julie Ann Madden

Editor, Akron Hometowneer

David Mayberry

Editor, Mason City Globe Gazette

Trevis Mayfield

President, Maquoketa Sentinel-Press, Bellevue Herald-Leader, DeWitt Observer

Matt Milner

Managing editor, Ottumwa Courier

Gage Miskimen

Editor in chief, The Daily Iowan

Rick Morain

Member, Iowa Public Information Board

Alan Mores

Co-Publisher, Harlan Newspapers

Lyle Muller

Executive director, Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism, Iowa City

Charlie Nixon

Editor, Coon Rapids Enterprise

Kyle J. Ocker

Editor, Centerville Daily Iowegian; regional editor, Knoxville Journal-Express, Pella Chronicle

Dylan Parker

Analyst, Indiana-Illinois-Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting

Abigail Pelzer

Publisher, Marshalltown Times-Republican

Kathleen Richardson

Dean, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Drake University

Mark Siebert

Assistant professor multimedia communications, Simpson College



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This letter also is signed by the following individuals. Their titles and employers are provided for identification purposes:

Karen Spurgeon

Publisher, Bloomfield Democrat

Brian Steffen

Professor and chair, multimedia communication, Simpson College

Kent Thompson

News editor, Humboldt Independent

Chuck Vandenberg

Editor, Pen City Current, Fort Madison

Mark Witherspoon

Editorial adviser, Iowa State Daily

David Witke

*Retired managing editor,
The Des Moines Register*