

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 17, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to express deep concern about the continued imprisonment of Jimmy Lai. As a Senator and as Secretary of State, you have been a strong advocate for Mr. Lai, and President Trump has said he will work to free Mr. Lai. We ask you work with Congress as you continue to push for Mr. Lai's release.

Mr. Lai, a 77-year-old British citizen and publisher, awaits sentencing after a 156-day sham trial under China's draconian Hong Kong National Security Law. After nearly five years in near-continuous solitary confinement, Mr. Lai's health has deteriorated to an alarming degree. The situation is urgent.

Jimmy Lai has been targeted because he used his newspaper, the *Apple Daily*, to expose Beijing's efforts to crush dissent and dismantle the rule of law in Hong Kong. He gave voice to those silenced, challenged censorship, and revealed the truth. For this, he has been unjustly detained since 2020 and denied access to counsel, UK officials, and even his chaplain. As he said during his trial, "All I was doing was carrying a torch to the reality of what was happening in Hong Kong."¹ His crime was journalism.

The charges against Mr. Lai are manufactured to punish him for exercising free expression. His latest indictment for "conspiracy to collude with foreign forces" carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, which at his age and condition would amount to a death sentence. In reality, his true offense is exposing the truth about Beijing's repression.

Mr. Lai suffers from diabetes, a condition that requires proper medical care. Instead, he has been left vulnerable in prison, where he spends more than 23 hours a day in a "tiny airless cell" without natural sunlight.

China's actions in Hong Kong are part of a broader campaign of oppression. The Chinese government has broken its promises to the people of Hong Kong, silenced a free press, jailed peaceful activists, and rewritten the city's laws to consolidate its grip on power. The United States must be clear: Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong is unacceptable, and we will stand with those who risk everything to speak the truth.

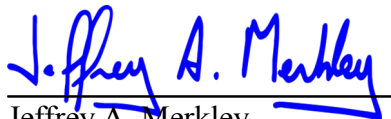
¹ Tiffany May, "What to know about Jimmy Lai's Trial in Hong Kong," The New York Times , August 27, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/27/world/asia/jimmy-lai-trial-what-to-know.html>

Mr. Lai's imprisonment has galvanized both Democrats and Republicans in the United States and sparked concern around the world, underscoring the need to act now.

As such, we urge you to marshal every diplomatic tool at your disposal, coordinate closely with the United Kingdom, and raise his case directly with Chinese officials at the highest levels. We also request a briefing from the State Department at the earliest possible opportunity, outlining the administration's efforts to secure Mr. Lai's release, including how you are working with the United Kingdom and pressing this case with China.

Beijing's assault on Jimmy Lai is an assault on free expression and democracy. The United States must not look away. It is time to free Jimmy Lai.

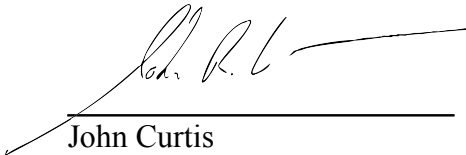
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



John Curtis
United States Senator



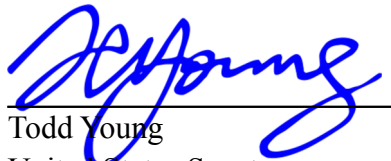
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator