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To University of Minnesota President Rebecca Cunningham, University administration and the University of Minnesota Police Department:

The Minnesota Daily board of directors is appalled by the treatment of journalists during the Oct. 21 protests, including Daily reporter Tyler Church.

During an occupation of Morrill Hall, Tyler Church, who wore a “PRESS” vest clearly identifying himself as a journalist, reported from inside the building. The University of Minnesota Police Department detained Tyler for three hours before releasing him, refusing to give him his backpack, which included his laptop, reporting notes and schoolwork.

Tyler followed UMPD’s orders to retrieve his belongings the next day, but was told they were being held in “safekeeping” until after lockdown. He tried multiple times to retrieve his belongings, but police refused to release his materials, telling him it was evidence he would not receive until trial.

Only after intervention from Hubbard School director Elisia Cohen to multiple top-level administrators did UMPD engage with Tyler. Yet police held Tyler’s reporting material without providing a timeline. Tyler asked for his materials back by 4 p.m. the same day UMPD contacted him and, to Officer Josh Betts’ credit, he made this work.

UMPD’s statement following the release of Tyler’s materials also troubles the board.

Their account omitted key details, accepted no responsibility and offered no apology — blaming “chaotic circumstances” for violating Tyler’s rights and jeopardizing a student’s academic success.

Chaos is no excuse for violating a student reporter’s rights.

Tyler, as a reporter for the Minnesota Daily, was doing exactly what he is supposed to do: report the news and serve the public interest of the University.

The Minnesota Daily board of directors takes great pride in the student newsroom as a learning lab for emerging journalists and expects the staff to carry themselves ethically and professionally. Tyler did just that.

Tyler did not start the protest. Tyler did not partake in any destruction at Morrill Hall. Tyler did what he was told. He verbally identified himself as a reporter and wore a clearly labeled vest with “PRESS” printed on the front.

President Rebecca Cunningham, University administration and UMPD should be ashamed of UMPD’s violation of Tyler’s rights as a reporter. Their actions are an affront to the First Amendment from a University whose own mission statement says it is “dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and to the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world.”

The Minnesota Daily board is committed to working with University administration and UMPD to make sure journalists’ rights are not violated in the future. We respectfully ask the following:

### 1. A public apology

The University’s statement lacked any sense of fault or contrition. At no point did UMPD say they did anything wrong. In fact, their statement made disregarding Tyler’s rights seem noble.

This is unacceptable. At the very least, UMPD owes Tyler a public apology.

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## 2. University police should undergo annual media law training

This will ensure officers, who often do find themselves in chaotic environments, know the rights of reporters and don't subject the department or the University to legal liability, including civil damages. Just as reporters go through training on interacting with police, so, too, should officers go through training on interacting with journalists.

The Minnesota Daily is more than happy to connect with the University and UMPD on media law training.

## 3. Make a public commitment to uphold local, state, and federal laws that protect journalists

Student journalists play a vital role within the University community. Even during periods of unrest, it is crucial to uphold rights and freedoms.

We urge the University to make a public commitment to uphold local, state and federal laws that protect journalists, especially student journalists, as they cover protests, demonstrations and moments of civil unrest.

This commitment should be clear, transparent, and easily accessible to the public as part of a policies and procedures document and posted on the University of Minnesota website and/or The Office of General Counsel's website, ensuring transparency and accessibility.

Ensuring consistent communication with journalists will help prevent the kind of silence and confusion that Tyler experienced, demonstrating the University's dedication to journalistic freedom and transparency.

Protests and demonstrations will likely continue, underscoring the urgency of a clear commitment to safeguarding journalistic rights.

The Minnesota Daily welcomes collaboration with the University to support all journalists and promote the free flow of information.

## 4. University administration should open a dialogue with Minnesota Daily editors and reporters

The University has been too concerned with control to the point of building barriers between itself and student reporters. It has created an unhealthy environment, as evidenced by UMPD's actions against Tyler.

Minnesota Daily reporters play a crucial role in ensuring transparency and accountability from the University, but the frequent hostility shown toward student reporters will only lead to more – and possibly worse – situations such as the one following these protests.

President Cunningham, you have the opportunity to change the culture of secrecy our student reporters face. Instead of administration and staff concerning themselves with blocking reporters, you can bring some much-needed transparency to the University.

Meet with student reporters regularly. In line with creating a better relationship, quit charging student media exorbitant fees for public data. Instruct others at the University to meet with reporters, photographers and editors.

We recommend fixing these problems — which predate your term — by scheduling regular meetings with the Daily's journalists. Have constructive, professional dialogue with student reporters and hear their issues.

We look forward to hearing your response and working with you on this proposal.