



Statement of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers on the Rule of Law, Protest, and the Use of Government Force

January 26, 2026, MINNEAPOLIS, MN -- The killing of Renee Nicole Good, an unarmed woman shot during an immigration-related operation in Minneapolis, demands that the Nation stop and confront a hard truth. The right to protest peacefully is not a privilege granted by the government. It is a constitutional right that lies at the heart of democratic self-government. When citizens gather to object to government overreach, they are exercising democracy itself. When they are met with lethal force, the Rule of Law is in grave peril.

That same peril is reflected in the killing of Alex Jeffrey Pretti, who was pepper-sprayed and then shot at least ten times by federal agents during a confrontation that arose while he was exercising his First Amendment rights. Like Ms. Good, Mr. Pretti was not engaged in violence. He was protesting the federal government's actions. The deaths of both individuals send a chilling and intolerable message that dissent may be met, not with restraint or accountability, but with deadly force.

What is happening in Minneapolis is not normal and must not be normalized. A society governed by law cannot accept a reality in which people are killed for protesting government overreach, killed while protesting, or deterred from protesting by fear of retaliation or death.

Courts have repeatedly been forced to intervene to protect the rights of demonstrators, legal observers, and journalists, issuing injunctions to restrain federal agents from arresting or retaliating against those engaged in lawful protest.

Citizens must be allowed to continue to protest openly, lawfully, and without fear of being harmed or killed by the very government whose actions they challenge.

Responsibility for this breakdown in restraint does not rest solely with anonymous institutions. It rests with the Trump Administration. When senior officials, including Pam Bondi, the Attorney General of the United States, defend or rationalize the use of lethal force against protesters, dismiss judicial oversight, or frame dissent as a threat to be suppressed, they invert the constitutional order. The Justice Department and federal law enforcement do not serve a President. They serve the Constitution and are guided by the Rule of Law. Any suggestion to the contrary is wrong.

Responsibility for this climate of misinformation and escalation also extends beyond the Department of Justice. Kristi Noem, Secretary of Homeland Security, has publicly vilified the victims of these shootings and defended federal actions through rhetoric untethered from facts. Such statements deepen the anguish of grieving families, inflame public distrust, and undermine confidence in lawful governance. When senior officials distort events or disparage civilians who were exercising constitutional rights, they erode the Rule of Law they are sworn to uphold. The anguish caused by these deaths is real, justified, and shared far beyond Minneapolis. A government committed to the Rule of Law does not respond to protests with escalation, intimidation, and killing its citizens. It responds with restraint, accountability, and respect for



constitutional rights. This administration, on the other hand, responded with authoritarian and chilling actions.

This is America. Protest is not disorder. Dissent is not disloyalty. And force is not a lawful response to speech.

The International Academy of Trial Lawyers speaks now because history teaches that the moment to defend the Rule of Law is not after it has been lost, but while it can be saved.

This statement is issued by the President and Executive Committee of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.

About the International Academy of Trial Lawyers

The International Academy of Trial Lawyers is a fellowship of lawyers with a singular mission to protect and promote the Rule of Law. Founded in 1954, the Academy consists of the best trial lawyers as measured by skill, experience, ethics, and civility. It represents both sides of the trial bar: prosecutors and defense lawyers in criminal cases; plaintiff and defense counsel in civil litigation. To learn more, visit IATL.net.

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