

April 10, 2025

The Honorable Jamee E. Comans  
830 Pine Hill Road  
P.O. Box 2179  
Jena, LA 71342

Via email to [LaSalle.Immigration.Court@usdoj.gov](mailto:LaSalle.Immigration.Court@usdoj.gov)

**Re: Remote public access to Mahmoud Khalil immigration hearings**

Dear Judge Comans,

We are nonprofit organizations dedicated to defending press freedom. We write to request that you allow journalists and members of the public to remotely observe any further immigration proceedings in your court regarding Mahmoud Khalil.

According to news reports, on April 8, 2025, nearly 600 people attempted to remotely observe proceedings in your court related to Mr. Khalil's immigration status.<sup>1</sup> You denied a request by Mr. Khalil's attorney to allow the public online access to the proceeding.<sup>2</sup> We are aware of at least three journalists who were unable to access the proceeding remotely as a result. There were likely many more.

We appreciate that members of the press and the public were able to attend the April 8 hearing in person to observe and report on the hearing. However, we request that you allow remote access to future proceedings for journalists and members of the public who are unable to attend hearings in person, including an upcoming hearing planned for April 11, 2025.

If that hearing or future hearings are to be held entirely remotely, applicable regulations require that the public be allowed access.<sup>3</sup> But even if in-person attendance is an option, providing remote access is the transparent — and right — thing to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Delaney Nolan, *Judge gives Trump administration deadline to justify Mahmoud Khalil's deportation*, Guardian (Apr. 8, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/08/mahmoud-khalil-deportation-judge-deadline-trump>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> The Code of Federal Regulations provides that “[a]ll hearings, other than exclusion hearings, shall be open to the public,” excepted in certain limited circumstances specified by the regulation. 8 C.F.R. § 1003.27. To the extent that immigration proceedings are held entirely virtually, this provision appears to require the Court to provide remote access to the proceedings by members of the public.

Mr. Khalil's case has been the subject of immense public interest across the United States and around the world.<sup>4</sup> It has been covered by everyone from major newspapers<sup>5</sup> and network news<sup>6</sup> to smaller news outlets,<sup>7</sup> independent journalists,<sup>8</sup> and student journalists,<sup>9</sup> among others.

The interest in this case extends far beyond Louisiana. While some national and international news outlets may be able to send journalists to cover the proceedings in person, for others, in-person attendance is impossible or prohibitively expensive. The same is true for members of the public who may wish to observe the proceedings firsthand. Journalists and others from New York, where Mr. Khalil has lived for some time, are unlikely to be able to travel to Louisiana to attend hearings.

Online access would let the public and journalists who are unable to attend proceedings in person observe them report their observations to others. This access would improve public understanding of and trust in our immigration courts, as well as the justice system as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Numerous courts at both the state<sup>11</sup> and federal levels<sup>12</sup> permit remote access by the public and the press to proceedings, sometimes including trials. The United States Supreme Court provides a live feed of audio of its oral arguments.<sup>13</sup> There is no reason why immigration courts cannot do the same, in Mr. Khalil's case or similar cases that may come before this Court in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Minh Kim, Charlie Savage & Edward Wong, *The U.S. Is Trying to Deport Mahmoud Khalil, a Legal Resident. Here's What to Know.*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 10, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/10/us/politics/mahmoud-khalil-legal-resident-deportation.html>; A l'université Columbia, aux Etats-Unis, un leader des manifestations propalestiniennes arrêté par les autorités fédérales, Le Monde (Mar. 10, 2025), [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/03/10/a-l-universite-columbia-aux-etats-unis-un-leader-des-manifestations-propalestiniennes-arrete-par-les-autorites-federales\\_6577702\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/03/10/a-l-universite-columbia-aux-etats-unis-un-leader-des-manifestations-propalestiniennes-arrete-par-les-autorites-federales_6577702_3210.html).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Corinne Ramey & Victoria Albert, *Arrested Columbia Student to Remain in Louisiana, Judge Orders*, Wall Street J. (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/mahmoud-khalil-columbia-ice-arrest-louisiana-cbfa45d2>.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., *Columbia activist Mahmoud Khalil fights extradition in NJ court*, ABC News (Mar. 28, 2025), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8OgPvwPMAo>.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Bobbi-Jeanne Misick, *Mahmoud Khalil appears before Louisiana immigration judge*, Verite News (Apr. 8, 2025), <https://veritenews.org/2025/04/08/mahmoud-khalil-louisiana-immigration-judge/>.

<sup>8</sup> Austin Kocher, *Your Introduction to Mahmoud Khalil's Deportation Case and the Legal Battle Ahead*, Austin Kocher (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://austinkocher.substack.com/p/your-introduction-to-mahmoud-khalils>.

<sup>9</sup> Surina Venkat & Tsehai Alfred, *Louisiana federal judge will rule to continue or terminate Khalil's deportation proceedings Friday*, Columbia Spectator (Apr. 9, 2025), <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2025/04/09/one-month-after-khalils-arrest-louisiana-federal-judge-says-shell-rule-to-continue-or-terminate-his-deportation-proceedings-friday/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v. Virginia*, 448 U.S. 555, 572 (1980) ("People in an open society do not demand infallibility from their institutions, but it is difficult for them to accept what they are prohibited from observing.")

<sup>11</sup> *Zoom Information and YouTube Support*, Texas Judicial Branch (last visited Apr. 9, 2025), <https://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/electronic-hearings-zoom/>.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., L. Civ. R. 77-3 [Revised] (N.D. Cal.) <https://www.cand.uscourts.gov/rules/civil-local-rules/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Oral Arguments*, Supreme Court of the United States, [https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral\\_arguments/oral\\_arguments.aspx](https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/oral_arguments.aspx) (last visited Apr. 10, 2025).

Thank you for considering this request. If you have any questions, please contact Seth Stern, Director of Advocacy at Freedom of the Press Foundation, at [seth@freedom.press](mailto:seth@freedom.press)

Sincerely,

Freedom of the Press Foundation  
Courage Foundation  
Defending Rights & Dissent  
First Amendment Coalition  
First Amendment Foundation  
Free Press  
Media and Democracy Project  
National Press Photographers Association  
PEN America  
Radio Television Digital News Association  
Whistleblower & Source Protection Program  
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