



CITY OF SANTA ANA

Councilmember-Requested Item Report

DATE

September 17, 2024

TOPIC

Withdrawal of “Guidelines for filming, photography and recording of City of Santa Ana public meetings” media policy

COUNCILMEMBER-REQUESTED ITEM TITLE

Discuss and Consider Directing the City Manager, City Attorney, and City Clerk to Rescind the “Guidelines for filming, photography and recording of City of Santa Ana public meetings” Media Policy

DISCUSSION

In early December 2023, a new policy on “Filming, photography and recording at City of Santa Ana public meetings” was implemented, heavily restricting the movement of photojournalists in the City Council chambers during public Council meetings. The policy was not brought forth for public discussion before being drafted or adopted. Later that month, the First Amendment Coalition (FAC) sent a letter to the City of Santa Ana objecting to the new policy, co-signed by the Orange County Press Club, Voice of Orange County, Los Angeles Press Club, Los Angeles Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, and the Industrial Workers of the World Freelance Journalists Union. In their letter, the FAC and its numerous co-signers argued that the policy “violates the Ralph M. Brown Act and threatens the ability of the press to exercise editorial discretion in covering public meetings,” urging the City to “immediately withdraw the policy and commit to adhering to the Brown Act and respecting press rights.”¹

The City Attorney responded to FAC’s letter by promising revisions to the policy.² In February 2024, a revised policy – “Guidelines for filming, photography and recording of City of Santa Ana public meetings” – was released.³ The revised media policy still heavily restricts the movement of photojournalists during public City Council meetings. It continues to require that individuals using “large” photography and recording equipment conduct their work only in “designated areas that are marked with red tape,” which are

¹ “FAC, News Groups Protest Santa Ana’s Public Meeting Photography and Recording Policy,” First Amendment Coalition, Dec. 22, 2023. firstamendmentcoalition.org/2023/12/fac-news-groups-protest-santa-ana-public-meeting-photography-and-recording-policy/

² Ibid.

³ City of Santa Ana, Office of the City Manager, “Guidelines for filming, photography and recording of City of Santa Ana public meetings,” Feb. 20, 2024.

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in the very back of the Council chambers. The “Guidelines” document does not make clear how the policy is to be enforced. The designated media area is extremely limited, and, in at least one instance, has been used by an individual for non-media purposes without repercussions.⁴ In addition, to date, the media policy has not been publicly discussed by the City Council nor has it been agreed upon by the Council majority.

Since December 2023, the “Guidelines for filming, photography and recording of City of Santa Ana public meetings” has been met with continued opposition from members and associations of the press. Most recently, Voice of Orange County publisher Norberto Santana, Jr. stated that the publication is “publicly protesting” the media policy and “is exploring legal options.”⁵ Rescinding the policy entirely would alleviate the issue and bring the City further in line with standards of local press freedoms.

We are proposing that the City Council discuss and consider directing the City Manager, City Attorney, and City Clerk to rescind the “Guidelines for filming, photography and recording of City of Santa Ana public meetings” policy.

SUBMITTED BY

Councilmembers Benjamin Vazquez and Jessie Lopez

⁴ Ben Camacho (@bencamach0), “And then there’s SAPD that takes up this city-designated media area (red tape on floor),” X, Jan. 16, 2024, 7:58 pm, <https://x.com/bencamach0/status/1747468453668401203>

⁵ Norberto Santana, Jr. “Santana: Politicians in Santa Ana Don’t Want Residents To See Them Up Close,” Voice of OC, Aug. 7, 2024. voiceofoc.org/2024/08/santana-fighting-off-a-press-pen-in-santa-ana/

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