

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

January 28, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As President of the United States, you have the ability to award the Nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The President historically bestows this honor to men and women who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security and safety of their fellow citizens.

As Senators and Representatives of the State of Maryland, we urge you to consider Wendi Winters, Rob Hiaasen, Gerald Fischman, John McNamara, and Rebecca Smith for this great distinction. On June 28, 2018, these individuals lost their lives in the deadliest attack on journalists in American history at the Capital *Gazette* newsroom in Annapolis, Maryland. Though their memories have been honored in numerous ways since the attack, including through the forthcoming National Memorial to Fallen Journalists, we concur with their families and former colleagues that they deserve our Nation's highest civilian honor. On January 24, 2021, the Capital *Gazette* editorial board wrote:

Wendi died protecting the Freedom of the Press, one of the fundamental liberties forming the bedrock of this nation. She willingly threw herself against a murderous attack from a man who wanted nothing less than to silence a news organization that had written something that angered him. He attacked to kill the truth. But the remaining victims of that day are also worthy of honor. Rob, Gerald and John were journalists who died for choosing a profession that aims to shine a light on the world. And while Rebecca was not a journalist, she was killed for merely associating with them.

According to eyewitness accounts from survivors, Wendi armed herself with the closest weapons at hand – her trash and recycling bins – and charged the shooter, enabling several of her coworkers to escape. In doing so, Wendi exhibited the highest values of her family's military tradition. She was the daughter of a Naval Academy graduate, the mother of three Navy officers, and a sponsor to numerous midshipmen over the years. Rob similarly served as a mentor to many young journalists over the years. Family, friends, and colleagues all miss Wendi and Rob and Gerald, John, and Rebecca, who “died for freedom's sake,” as the *Gazette* editorial put it.

Previous Presidents have awarded the Medal of Freedom posthumously on dozens of occasions. We believe these Marylanders, who embodied and protected the First Amendment, deserve such an honor. Since 2018, the animosity toward members of the press nationwide has

only gotten worse. On January 6, 2021, the insurrectionists who stormed the U.S. Capitol Building threatened, attacked, and detained members of the media and gleefully destroyed their equipment. This trend is incredibly corrosive to our democracy. While President Trump never responded to our 2018 request that he bestow this award in response to the Capital *Gazette* shooting, we are hopeful that you will.

Again, we enthusiastically recommend Wendi Winters, Rob Hiaasen, Gerald Fischman, John McNamara, and Rebecca Smith for the Presidential Medal of Freedom. We look forward to working with you and your administration to acknowledge and defend the free press that serves as a foundation for all of our liberties.

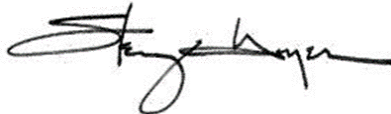
Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Steny H. Hoyer  
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes  
Member of Congress



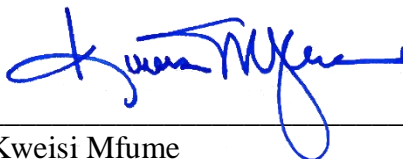
Anthony G. Brown  
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



David Trone  
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume  
Member of Congress