

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA :  
 :  
 v. : Case No. 1:21-cr-00184-BAH  
 :  
 JAMES ALLEN MELS, :  
 :  
 Defendant. :

**UNITED STATES' MOTION *IN LIMINE* TO PRECLUDE IMPROPER DEFENSE  
ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE ABOUT LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The United States of America, by and through its attorney, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, hereby requests that the Court issue an order precluding the defendant from any of the following: (1) arguing any entrapment by estoppel defense related to law enforcement; (2) offering evidence or argument concerning any claim that by allegedly failing to act, law enforcement made the defendant's entry into the United States Capitol building or grounds or his conduct therein lawful; or (3) arguing or presenting evidence of alleged inaction by law enforcement unless the defendant specifically observed or was otherwise aware of such conduct. The government conferred with counsel for the defendant; counsel for the defendant stated that she is not prepared to take a position on the motion at this time.

**1. This Court Should Preclude the Defendant from Arguing Entrapment by Estoppel**

The defendant should be prohibited from making arguments or attempting to introduce evidence that law enforcement gave permission to the defendant to enter the U.S. Capitol. "To win an entrapment-by-estoppel claim, a defendant criminally prosecuted for an offense must prove (1) that a government agent *actively* misled him about the state of the law defining the offense; (2) that the government agent was responsible for interpreting, administering, or enforcing the law defining the offense; (3) that the defendant actually relied on the agent's misleading

pronouncement in committing the offense; and (4) that the defendant's reliance was reasonable in light of the identity of the agent, the point of law misrepresented, and the substance of the misrepresentation." *United States v. Chrestman*, 525 F. Supp. 3d 14, 31 (D.D.C. 2021) (emphasis added) (quoting *United States v. Cox*, 906 F.3d 1170, 1191 (10th Cir. 2018)).

In *Chrestman*, this Court rejected an entrapment by estoppel argument raised by a January 6th defendant charged with, *inter alia*, violations of 18 U.S.C. §§ 1512(c)(2), 1752(a)(1) and (b)(1)(A) and 1752(a)(2) and (b)(1)(A). Although *Chrestman* involved an argument that former President Trump gave the defendant permission to enter the Capitol building, this Court's reasoning in *Chrestman* applies equally to an argument that a member of law enforcement gave permission to the defendant to enter the Capitol building. As this Court reasoned in *Chrestman*, "*Cox* unambiguously forecloses the availability of the defense in cases where a government actor's statements constitute 'a waiver of law' beyond his or her lawful authority." *Chrestman*, 525 F. Supp. 3d at 32 (quoting *Cox v. Louisiana*, 379 U.S. 559, 569 (1965)). Just as "no President may unilaterally abrogate criminal laws duly enacted by Congress as they apply to a subgroup of his most vehement supporters," no member of law enforcement could use his authority to allow individuals to enter the Capitol building during a violent riot, and after "obvious police barricades, police lines, and police orders restricting entry at the Capitol" had already been put in place by the United States Capitol Police and the Secret Service. *Id.* at 32. Indeed, just this week, this Court ruled in another January 6, 2021, case that "the logic in *Chrestman* that a U.S. President cannot unilaterally abrogate statutory law applies with equal force to government actors in less powerful offices, such as law enforcement officers protecting the U.S. Capitol Building." Memorandum and Order, *United States v. Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, at \*2 (D.D.C. June 8, 2022).

Even if the defendant could establish that a member of law enforcement told him that it was lawful to enter the Capitol building or allowed him to do so, the defendant's reliance on any such statement would not be reasonable in light of the "obvious police barricades, police lines, and police orders restricting entry at the Capitol." *Chrestman*, 525 F. Supp. 3d at 32.

Moreover, the defendant's actions belie any argument that he actually relied on any such statement by law enforcement when he made his decision to unlawfully enter the Capitol building and grounds. The defendant entered the Capitol Building through the breached Senate Wing Door only moments after other rioters forcibly broke the doors open, within eyesight of shattered windows and, in all likelihood, within eyesight of those rioters' violent breach in the first place.

Accordingly, defendant should be prohibited from arguing that his conduct was lawful because law enforcement allegedly told him it was.

**2. This Court Should Preclude the Defendant from Arguing That Alleged Inaction by Law Enforcement Officers Made His Conduct on January 6, 2021 Legal**

In addition to prohibiting any defense arguments that law enforcement actively communicated to the defendant that entering the Capitol building or grounds was lawful, the Court should also bar the defendant from arguing that any failure to act by law enforcement rendered his conduct legal. The same reasoning this Court applied in *Chrestman* again applies here. That is, like the Chief Executive, a Metropolitan Police Officer or Capitol Police Officer cannot "unilaterally abrogate criminal laws duly enacted by Congress" through his or her purported inaction. *Chrestman*, 525 F. Supp. 3d at 33. An officer cannot shield an individual from liability for an illegal act by failing to enforce the law or ratify unlawful conduct by failing to prevent it. Indeed, this Court expressly reached that conclusion in *Williams* earlier this week. *Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, at \*3 ("Settled caselaw makes clear that law officer inaction—whatever the

reason for the inaction—cannot sanction unlawful conduct.”). It should apply the same principle in this case.

Accordingly, defendant should be prohibited from arguing that his conduct was lawful because law enforcement officers allegedly failed to prevent it or censure it when it occurred.

**3. This Court Should Preclude the Defendant from Arguing or Presenting Evidence of Alleged Inaction by Law Enforcement Officers Unless the Defendant Specifically Observed or Was Otherwise Aware of Such Conduct**

The government acknowledges that the conduct of law enforcement officers may be relevant to the defendant’s state of mind on January 6, 2021. However, unless the defendant shows that, at the relevant time, he specifically observed or was otherwise aware of some alleged inaction by law enforcement, such evidence is irrelevant to the defendant’s intent. Federal Rule of Evidence 401 states that evidence is relevant if it “has any tendency to make a fact more or less probable ... and the fact is of consequence in determining the action.” Fed. R. Evid. 401. Here, if the defendant was not aware of law enforcement’s alleged inaction at the time of his entry onto restricted grounds or into the Capitol building (or at the time he committed the other offenses charged in the Information), any alleged inaction would have no bearing on the defendant’s state of mind and therefore would not meet the threshold for relevance. Again, this Court adopted the same reasoning in granting an analogous motion in limine earlier this week in *Williams*. *Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, at \*3-4. It should reach the same conclusion in this case.

Consequently, this Court should exclude testimony and evidence of any alleged inaction by the police as irrelevant, except to the extent the defendant shows that he specifically observed or was aware of the alleged inaction by the police when he committed the offenses charged in the Information.

## CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth herein, the United States respectfully requests that this Court preclude improper argument or evidence related to entrapment by estoppel, that law enforcement's alleged inaction rendered the defendant's actions lawful, and any evidence or argument relating to alleged inaction by law enforcement except to the extent that the defendant specifically observed or was otherwise aware of such conduct at the relevant time.

Dated: June 10, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

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