

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

<b>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</b>	:	
	:	
<b>v.</b>	:	<b>Case No. 21-cr-179 (RCL)</b>
	:	
<b>RACHEL POWELL,</b>	:	
	:	
<b>Defendant.</b>	:	

**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 Rachel Powell 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 her conduct therein lawful; or (3) arguing or presenting evidence of alleged inaction by law enforcement unless the defendant specifically observed or were otherwise aware of such conduct.

**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*, the 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, the 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 the 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, the 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 her that it was lawful to enter the Capitol building or grounds or allowed her 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 she actually relied on any such statement by law enforcement when she made a decision to unlawfully enter the Capitol building and grounds. The defendant pushed against barricades set up to prevent rioters from approaching Capitol grounds. Then, the defendant attempted to push past law enforcement officer at the Lower West Terrace tunnel. Rather than enter through a door, the defendant eventually climbed through a broken window and entered the U.S. Capitol. Accordingly, the defendant should be prohibited from arguing that her conduct was lawful because law enforcement allegedly told her it was.

**2. This Court Should Preclude the Defendant from Arguing that Alleged Inaction by Law Enforcement Officers Made Her 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 her conduct legal. The same reasoning that 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, the Court expressly reached that conclusion in *Williams*. *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, the defendant should be prohibited from arguing that her 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 Were 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, she specifically observed or were 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 her entry onto restricted grounds or into the Capitol building (or at the time she committed the other offenses charged in the Indictment), any alleged inaction would have no bearing on the defendant’s state of mind and therefore would not meet the threshold for relevance. The Court adopted the same reasoning in granting an analogous motion *in limine*. See *Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, at \*3-4. The Court should reach the same conclusion in this case and should exclude testimony and evidence of any alleged inaction by the police as irrelevant, except to the extent the defendant shows that she specifically observed or were aware of the alleged inaction by the police when she committed the offenses charged in the Indictment.

**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 were otherwise aware of such conduct at the relevant time.

Respectfully submitted,

MATTHEW GRAVES  
United States Attorney  
D.C. Bar No. 481052

By: /s/ Lucy Sun  
Lucy Sun  
Assistant United States Attorney  
Massachusetts Bar Number 691766

#### **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Lucy Sun, hereby certify that on this day, February 24, 2023, I caused a copy of the foregoing document to be served on the defendant's attorney, Nicholas Smith, via ECF.

By: /s/ Lucy Sun  
Lucy Sun