

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

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

**LUKE WESSLY BENDER and
LONDON BRYCE MITCHELL,**

Defendants.

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Case No.: 1:21-CR-508 (BAH)

**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 defendants Luke Wessly Bender and Landon Bryce Mitchell 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 defendants' entry into the United States Capitol building or grounds or their conduct therein lawful; or (3) arguing or presenting evidence of alleged inaction by law enforcement unless the defendants specifically observed or were otherwise aware of such conduct. Defendants Luke Wessly Bender and Landon Bryce Mitchell have not taken a position regarding the relief sought in this motion.

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

The defendants should be prohibited from making arguments or attempting to introduce evidence that law enforcement gave permission to the defendants 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, the reasoning in *Chrestman* applies equally to an argument that a member of law enforcement gave permission to the defendants to enter the Capitol building. As the Court explained 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 determined 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." *United States v. Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, ECF No. 87 at *2 (D.D.C. June 8, 2022).

Even if the defendants could establish that a member of law enforcement told them that it was lawful to enter the Capitol building or allowed them to do so, the defendants' 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 defendants' actions belie any argument that they actually relied on any such statement by law enforcement when they made a decision to unlawfully enter the Capitol building and grounds. Defendants advanced on the Capitol Building by climbing scaffolding that was erected for the inauguration of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., and once they reached the top but before entering, they contend that they were pepper sprayed by officers who were attempting to stop the advance of the crowd. Mitchell later posted on social media that he and Bender were "one of the first to breach the Capitol" and bragged, "me and my boy were one [of] the very first in. Climbed the scaffolding up 3 stories, pushed back the police and breached the doors!" Accordingly, defendants should be prohibited from arguing that their conduct was lawful because law enforcement allegedly told them it was.

2. This Court Should Preclude the Defendants from Arguing that Alleged Inaction by Law Enforcement Officers Made Their Conduct on January 6, 2021 Legal

In addition to prohibiting any defense arguments that law enforcement actively communicated to the defendants that entering the Capitol building or grounds was lawful, the Court should also bar the defendants from arguing that any failure to act by law enforcement rendered their 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, another the Court expressly reached that conclusion in *Williams* earlier this year. *See Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, ECF No. 87 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, defendants should be prohibited from arguing that their conduct was lawful because law enforcement officers allegedly failed to prevent it or censure it when it occurred.

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

The government acknowledges that the conduct of law enforcement officers may be relevant to the defendants’ state of mind on January 6, 2021. However, unless the defendants show that, at the relevant time, they specifically observed or were otherwise aware of some alleged inaction by law enforcement, such evidence is irrelevant to the defendants’ 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 defendants were not aware of law enforcement’s alleged inaction at the time of their entry onto restricted grounds or into the Capitol building (or at the time they committed the other offenses charged in the Indictment), any alleged inaction would have no bearing on the defendants’ state of mind and therefore would not meet the threshold for relevance. Again, the Court adopted the same reasoning in granting an analogous motion *in limine* in *Williams*. *See Williams*, No. 21-cr-377-BAH, ECF No. 87 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 defendants show that they specifically observed or were aware of the alleged inaction by the police when they 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 defendants' actions lawful, and any evidence or argument relating to alleged inaction by law enforcement except to the extent that the defendants specifically observed or were otherwise aware of such conduct at the relevant time.

Respectfully submitted,

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