



April 22, 2026

Mayor Renard Johnson & City Council
300 N. Campbell Street
El Paso, Texas 79901

Dear Mayor Johnson and Council Members,

My name is Lesley Engle, and I'm the Content Manager for ABC-7 in El Paso.

During my more than 20-year career in media, I have spent much of that time focused on the critical issues of government transparency and accountability.

ABC-7 recently learned that you gave preliminary approval to draft a policy that would limit and restrict public discussion by elected officials—an approach we believe is ill-advised.

After reviewing the April 1 City Council meeting, it appears that Representatives Art Fierro and Deanna Maldonado-Rocha placed this item on the agenda following a situation in which Mayor Renard Johnson was unable to respond to a question from a national media outlet regarding the February airspace closure in El Paso. The mayor indicated that the inquiry involved information previously shared on social media by a city council member.

We recognize that this situation may have been uncomfortable; however, we urge careful consideration of any policy changes that could broadly limit who is able to speak on matters you consider to be of national interest. Elected officials play an important role in sharing information with the public, and open communication remains essential, regardless of where that information is initially shared.

Although some council members have stated that this policy would not “muzzle” elected officials, ABC-7—and many of our viewers, including your constituents—do not share that view. Instead, such a policy risks creating message control at the expense of transparency. While Representative Maldonado-Rocha has said the policy would not restrict speech, establishing formal “rules” could, in practice, limit an individual’s ability to communicate, particularly outside their official duties, or even create a chilling effect.

I have worked in several news markets, covering cities and states, including New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. In those regions, I have never encountered a policy like the one under discussion—nor one that would require disclaimers in the manner some of you have proposed for news releases.

At the City Council meeting, City Attorney Karla Nieman said she had not found similar policies in other council-manager cities, while City Manager Dionne Mack said Dallas has a policy like the one being proposed.

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I followed up with Dallas and obtained a copy of its policy. After reviewing it, I found it is not similar to the proposed policy, a point confirmed by City Spokeswoman Laura Cruz-Acosta. The information shared at the meeting was inaccurate.

ABC-7 remains dedicated to rigorous journalism, editorial independence, and the responsible oversight of elected and appointed officials.

While policies that restrict the flow of information may address an immediate concern, they also risk producing unintended consequences that could ultimately disserve the public interest.

Such a policy would also be impractical, particularly if the mayor is not available at all times.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you not to move forward with this proposal.

If we have misinterpreted any aspect of the proposed policy, please let us know.

We plan to follow up in 7–10 days after you have had an opportunity to review these concerns. We are also available to speak sooner if that would be helpful.

I can be reached on my cellphone at **207-272-0044**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lesley Engle'.

Lesley Engle, ABC-7

Content Manager

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