

# OPINION

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition their Government for a redress of grievances.



## What are we willing to allow?

*“There is nothing more terrifying than hearing multiple people get shot while you’re under your desk and then you hear the gunman reload.”*

Phil David and Anthony Messenger are journalists. And after the shooting at their newsroom in Maryland on Thursday,



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June 28, they’re still alive. At least five of their colleagues are not. In the hours after another shooting, I don’t know what to say other than, as they hid under their desks, journalists of the *Capital Gazette* newspaper sent tweets like the ones above and reported on the incident.

As of Thursday afternoon, there’s not a lot known about what happened in Maryland.

The shooter is in custody. He’s a white male. He had an issue with a story the newspaper ran back in 2011. He used a “long gun.”

But it’s not about guns because he could have attacked that newsroom with an axe or a knife or a bomb.

It’s about deciding that the solution to conflict is violence — and a society that condones such a solution. It’s also about setting a precedent that if an individual feels their ideology is being threatened by fact — or that their facts are being skewed by fiction — during the commission of a crime, that it validates their intent to do harm.

That notion suggests that their action is a measured choice rather than just a form of primal justice.

We can’t kill people. Period. And the penalty for writing something that someone else disagrees should never warrant a death sentence.

The most serious legal offense a

journalist can commit within his or her profession is to maliciously defame someone through intentional libel. However, for those indiscretions the civilized course of action mandated by the laws that govern our society is to engage in due process — in front of a judge, not the barrel of a gun initiated by a jury of one.

I don’t know what happened in Maryland.

But I do know if we allow space for discourse that suggests the slightest validation for these actions as a result of the current rhetoric surrounding journalism, then we’ve moved beyond the arena of civilized debate and into a tribalism that cannot support a free society.

Five people are dead. I don’t know what to say other than what Chase Cook, a reporter at the *Capital Gazette* tweeted on Thursday afternoon: “I can tell you this: We are putting out a damn paper tomorrow.”

### Letters to the Editor Policy

The *Sentinel* welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The *Sentinel* readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

### Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn’t follow the above criteria.

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