

SUMMARY

Police all over the nation have given up on issuing press credentials, likely for both administrative and constitutional reasons. This appears to be a tacit admission that they can't and shouldn't be issuing them. The small number of California departments that cling to the practice are out of step with the national trend, especially when they require fingerprinting and background checks like LAPD and LASD. Locally, CHP and OC Sheriff are among the departments that used to issue press credentials but abandoned the practice. National examples of police departments that shuttered their programs include Boston, Dallas County, Houston, Las Vegas, San Antonio and Washington DC Metro. There may be no police departments left outside of California that still do background checks on journalists (possibly Seattle, trying to confirm).

To be clear, the focus here is on use cases where police issue credentials for use in what would regularly be public spaces where journalists may need to cross police lines. This is a critical distinction from spaces that are regularly closed or secured. For example, Omaha PD has a secured room to review reports, and issues proximity passes for that room. The White House issues "hard cards" for expedited access to beat reporters. In Los Angeles, the LA Sheriff's Department is responsible for local court security, and proximity passes of some sort are necessary for reporters to do their job (like bringing certain equipment in). This is a process that must be preserved for these very narrow use cases.

EARLIER RESEARCH

In 2016, researchers from the University of Texas at Austin performed a census of police department practices on issuing press credentials in the 100 largest cities in the US. This is likely the most definitive research done in the United States on the topic of police-issued press credentials, with deeply considered academic theory. However, since this was done, some of the few remaining programs have been abandoned or changed.

At the time of that publication, they noted eight agencies had recently given up on press credential programs. There were ten still doing it, five in California and five outside California. Of the five outside, NYPD was such a mess that the City Council has subsequently voted to take the program away from the police and move it to the Mayor's office, where it's still controversial. Chicago had long since removed their fingerprint requirement. San Antonio has stopped their program since that 2016 census. As mentioned earlier, Omaha only issues passes that are for entering a secure area of a building to check reports (for civil unrest, they urge members of the media to have the credentials issued by their employer with them). That leaves Seattle (still confirming if they do background checks), plus the handful of California departments.

There may be other agencies/jurisdictions issuing press credentials that are not city-based (particularly federal, but possibly state or county based). Full published paper is here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15BjXAibceyVlzw7LKyB6U2zhxb7uzSpP/view>

STOPPED IN CALIFORNIA (2021 Research)

California Highway Patrol: Stopped November 2004. "The California Highway Patrol stopped issuing credentials about a decade ago because the job was too-time consuming and some abused them for backstage concert passes and other perks, said spokeswoman Fran Clader. The CHP now accepts any press identification, even a company business card."

<https://www.oregister.com/2013/03/11/new-media-challenge-press-pass-standards/>

"Hall, a 12-year U-T staffer and now public engagement editor, noted that the California Highway Patrol complained as long ago as 2004 that credentials were a 'management nightmare of who's in, who's out' with passes sometimes used to get holders into baseball games."

<https://patch.com/california/lajolla/journalists-press-their-cases-against-police-over-medb3a7d37edb>

Unverified CHP release (emailed PIO to verify): "Effective immediately, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) will no longer issue or renew press credentials. Current CHP press credentials are no longer valid and will no longer be recognized by law enforcement personnel. This action has been taken to maintain the security and integrity of identification documents issued by the CHP."

https://www.sportsshooter.com/message_display.html?tid=12835

CHP PIO 5/11/21 email to LA Press Club: "CHP policy is to allow access to all media representatives who present a valid form of identification, as well as reasonable verification that they are gathering information about a newsworthy event for purposes of publication. This includes official press credentials from reporters for traditional media. For nontraditional journalists, such as bloggers, it would be some way of demonstrating their newsgathering purpose. Policy directs CHP personnel to err on the side of inclusiveness."

Orange County (CA) Sheriff's Department: Stopped December 2012. "With the advancements in digital media and the proliferation of bloggers, podcasters and freelancers, it has become challenging to determine who should receive a press pass."

<https://www.oregister.com/2013/03/11/new-media-challenge-press-pass-standards/>

STOPPED IN OTHER STATES (2021 Research)

City of Atlanta: PIO unaware of them ever being issued per email to LA Press Club, and Atlanta Press Club also unaware of a history of this. However, indications online they may have stopped in 2003. Trying to verify.

https://www.sportsshooter.com/message_display.html?tid=12835

Boston Police Department: Stopped by 2010 if not sooner (verified by LAPC call with PIO).

"Boston police no longer provide credentials because they're familiar with press members, said James Kenneally, a spokesman for the Boston Police Department."

<https://www.rcfp.org/journals/the-news-media-and-the-law-fall-2010/police-departments-restructure/>

Chicago Police Department: Still issue, but by 2010 reduced requirements. “After eight years, the Chicago Police Department discontinued a policy of fingerprinting journalists before they would give press passes as well as a requirement that journalists must be employed as such on a full-time basis, reasoning the two were outdated procedures.”

<https://www.rcfp.org/journals/the-news-media-and-the-law-fall-2010/police-departments-restructure/>

Dallas County Sheriff's Department: Stopped in 2009. “Dallas County Sheriff Lupe Valdez is not giving out any more press badges. The reason? They're costly. And employee identification cards will give reporters basic access, according to the department.”

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/2009/01/21/dallas-sheriff-s-dept-to-media-no-more-press-badges-for-you/>

Houston Police Department: Stopped about 15 years ago (~2006). Per phone call b/w PIO and LA Press Club.

Las Vegas Police Department: Stopped in 2018. Unaware of any other agency that issues in their area. Per phone call b/w PIO and LA Press Club.

Massachusetts State Police: Stopped about 15 years ago (~2006). Per phone call b/w PIO and LA Press Club. He remembers seeing old ones, but discontinued long before his tenure.

San Antonio PD: Per PIO email, “We no longer issue press credentials.” (They were a “yes” in the 2016 census, clearly stopped since.)

New York Police Department: Transferring to NYC Mayor 2021/2022. “City Council passed a bill that transfers the power to issue press credentials from the police department to the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment.”

<https://gothamist.com/news/the-mayors-office-not-the-nypd-will-now-issue-nyc-press-credentials>

Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security: Stopped February 2013.

<https://www.oregionregister.com/2013/03/11/new-media-challenge-press-pass-standards/>

Texas Department of Public Safety: Likely stopped by 2004, need to verify (message board references only). Email out to PIO.

https://www.sportsshoooter.com/message_display.html?tid=12835

Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department: Stopped in 2015. “The issuance of media passes by the Metropolitan Police Department is no longer necessary. While we realize that specific pre-planned special events may require particular exemptions to this policy, it is in the best interests of MPD to discontinue issuing general media passes.”

<https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/media-pass-information-and-procedures>

NEVER STARTED/UNCLEAR

Confirmed not issuing via email: Phoenix PD

Emails out to PIOs: Philadelphia, Denver, Austin, Miami-Dade, Dallas PD

California Judicial Branch: In 2011, the California Judicial Council (operating under the state's Supreme Court) received a final report from their (now defunct) Bench-Bar-Media Committee on a variety of issues related to media access in all state court operations (including the 58 county Superior Courts, presumably the largest combined court system in America except maybe federal courts). The committee included notable judges, lawyers and news media leaders, but struggled to come up with any solutions on credentialing. On page 54 (literally the last words of the main report), they have a "Future consideration: credentialing" section that said, "The subject of how courts can properly identify legitimate reporters and provide appropriate access to court proceedings remains an unresolved issue. The committee discussed this subject several times but was not able to come to any recommendation because of the difficulty of determining who is a journalist in today's rapidly changing media forums. Several courts have reported difficulties with this issue during high-profile trials, especially when seating for the media is limited. As the demand for access to court proceedings increases, this subject will ultimately necessitate the development of recommended practices or guidelines for the superior courts."

<https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/jc-121311-itemL.pdf>

INTERNATIONAL/TOTALITARIAN EXAMPLES (FOR COMPARISON)

China: "The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is 're-educating' its already tightly controlled state media, requiring hundreds of thousands of journalists to sit an exam on the political thought of general secretary Xi Jinping to qualify for a new generation of official press cards." <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/press-11112020092314.html>

"Chinese journalists required to pass ideology exam as Communist Party tightens control: Journalists will have to study topics including Marxist news values, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and journalism ethics ... The exam will be based on a 700-page manual being sold in bookshops. The manual is peppered with directives such as 'it is absolutely not permitted for published reports to feature any comments that go against the party line,' and 'the relationship between the party and the news media is one of leader and the led.'"

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1385849/chinese-journalists-required-pass-ideology-exam-communist-party-tightens>

"China Freezes Credentials for Journalists at U.S. Outlets, Hinting at Expulsions ... American news organizations immediately affected by China's latest actions are CNN, The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News and Getty Images. Journalists from all four organizations tried to renew press cards with the Foreign Ministry in the past week, but were told the cards, which are usually good for one year, could not be renewed. In total, at least five journalists in the four organizations have been affected so far."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/06/us/politics/china-us-journalists-visas-expulsions.html>

Turkey: “Turkey’s Presidential Communications Directorate, which has received 10,486 applications from journalists for the renewal of their press cards, refused to renew the press cards of 1,371 journalists, Turkish Minute reported, citing the Bold Medya news website. ... A new regulation that resets the criteria for journalists to acquire press cards in Turkey was adopted in December 2018 in a move that disappointed and angered journalist organizations as it made the cancellation of press cards easier. ... The new regulation included several controversial articles that are said to curb freedom of the press. In the section concerning the cancellation of press cards, a new article was added, saying that press cards shall be cancelled if journalists act against national security or the public order or make a habit of displaying such behavior.”

<https://stockholmcf.org/turkish-presidency-refuses-to-renew-press-cards-of-1371-journalists/>

“One of Turkey’s highest courts has ruled the president cannot refuse to issue press accreditation for arbitrary reasons. A government spokesman reacted with defiance, calling journalists propaganda-spewing terrorists. ... According to a report published by the non-governmental organization Reporters without Borders (RSF), roughly 95% of Turkish media outlets are under government control. Limited access to accreditation represents yet another hurdle for journalists, as they are unable to carry out their profession if the government revokes their press credentials or lets them lapse without renewing them. ... In many countries around the world, press passes are issued by professional journalists’ associations or unions — that is not the case in Turkey. ... various vague excuses have been used to justify refusing journalists the right to work, most often, reasons such as ‘harming national security and public order’ or ‘damaging the professional honor of journalism’ are cited ... While many media outlets are under increasing legal and financial pressure, the government has branded journalists who publish critical pieces in print or on social media as ‘terrorists.’”

<https://www.dw.com/en/turkish-court-orders-erdogan-to-stop-denying-journalists-credentials/a-57307666>

LOS ANGELES AREA CREDENTIAL RATE

In 1970, the California Court of Appeal in *Los Angeles Free Press, v. City of Los Angeles* noted that, “The local demand for such Press Passes is substantial, the Los Angeles Police Department currently issuing approximately 1,800 each year and the Sheriff of Los Angeles County issuing approximately 3,000 each year.”

(<https://caselaw.findlaw.com/court/ca-court-of-appeal/1824112.html>).

From 2018-2021, on average LAPD issued only 125 press passes each year (new and renewal combined), based on numbers in a draft report prepared by command staff

(<https://recordsrequest.lacity.org/documents/17332615>).

According to LASD in response to a CPRA request in December 2025, “The LASD did not have an applicant tracking system prior to quarter 4 of 2021. There were 31 press passes issued in the year 2021, 96 for the year 2022, 171 for the year 2024, 246 for the year 2024, and 281 for

the year 2025." [Per prior communications between LASD SIB and Adam Rose, inmate labor was used to run the LASD print shop and it was shut down for extended periods in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID.]

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e8ps2r-71jh3blaFiZjL9dXdi3Ur5GcB/view?usp=sharing>

This means the practice might have been popular in Los Angeles over half a century ago, but averaging recent years now LASD issues 7.7% of the passes they used to and LAPD issues 7.7% as well. The matching number is coincidental, and it is unknown how many individuals may apply for both (i.e., you cannot identify total credentialed journalists simply by adding LASD and LAPD numbers, since many likely overlap). Other sources (unconfirmed department side conversation with Adam) have indicated as few as 24 LAPD passes issued in a more recent year, reflecting a potential 99% decline in issuance of LAPD press passes.

MORE RECENT EXAMPLES (2024 onward)

U.S. Capitol Police: "The media can be where the public can be, and the public can be where the media is at. That's what the law says. And that's why we stopped doing department-issued media credentials." – [Chief Tom Manger, U.S. Capitol Police](#)

San Diego Police Department: Ended program in February 2026.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W-xeE6-nA6u1FfVxc-MtE6oJOX_EwUVQ/view?usp=sharing