

# Story Pitch: Removal and Exclusion From Hillsdale Government Meetings

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Hello,

A local reporter suggested that I submit this story proposal for editorial consideration.

I am proposing a written interview concerning my removal from Hillsdale city and county government meetings, as well as my continued exclusion from public comment, after I declined to state my name.

The central question is not whether readers should agree with me or with the government. The question is how local public-comment rules are interpreted, whether declining to identify oneself is sufficient grounds to prevent a citizen from speaking, and when police removal is a lawful or necessary response.

The dispute also raises a broader question of governmental authority: Can a local meeting rule restrict conduct protected by state law or the Constitution? Local rules operate beneath state and federal law, and laws themselves remain subject to constitutional limitations. A written interview could examine where officials believe this identification requirement fits within that hierarchy.

I would suggest presenting the story in a written question-and-answer format, with city and county officials offered the same opportunity to explain their positions.

## **What happened?**

I attempted to speak during public comment at meetings of the Hillsdale City Council and Hillsdale County Board of Commissioners without publicly stating my name.

Officials maintained that meeting rules required identification, despite the rules then stating that a speaker's name was requested. When I continued to assert that I should be permitted to speak anonymously, I was denied the opportunity to speak and was ultimately removed.

Officials have cited meeting rules, disruption or breach-of-peace concerns, and advice attributed to police or the county prosecutor as reasons for their actions.

## **What occurred at the city meetings?**

At the May 4, 2026 Hillsdale City Council meeting, I was told that identifying myself was required before I could speak.

At the June 1 meeting, I again declined to state my name. The council considered whether I should be allowed to speak, the motion failed, and I was removed. Later in the same meeting, the council voted to amend its rules to expressly state that speakers were required to provide their names.

That sequence raises a factual question about what the rule required before it was amended and how it was being enforced at the time of my removal.

At the July 20, 2026 meeting, I again attempted to speak without stating my name. The amended identification rule remained in effect, and I was not permitted to make my public comment.

However, after four council members pushed back against removing me, I was allowed to remain in the meeting.

The different outcome raises additional questions. If my refusal to state my name required removal at the earlier meetings, why was removal unnecessary on July 20? If removal was discretionary, what standards governed the earlier decisions? Did my conduct constitute an actual disruption, or was the disagreement limited to whether I could speak?

## **What occurred at the county meeting?**

At the June 23, 2026 Hillsdale County Board of Commissioners meeting, I again attempted to speak without stating my name. I was removed by Hillsdale City Police.

Statements made during and after the incident indicated that police and prosecutorial advice played a role in the decision to remove me and in warnings that continued refusal could result in criminal charges and jail.

## **Why did you refuse to provide your name?**

My position is that citizens should be able to criticize or petition their government anonymously unless their conduct actually disrupts the meeting.

The city and county may take a different position. A neutral story could examine both interpretations without presuming which side is legally correct.

## **Were you attempting to disrupt the meetings?**

No. My purpose was to make a public comment and preserve a clear record of how the identification rules were being interpreted and enforced.

Officials may contend that refusing repeated instructions disrupted the orderly conduct of the meeting. That disagreement is one of the central issues the proposed interview could explore.

The July 20 meeting provides an important comparison. I was again denied the opportunity to speak, but I remained peaceful, was not removed, and the meeting continued.

## **What broader principle does this raise?**

Government bodies are entitled to adopt rules for conducting orderly meetings. The question is whether those rules remain subordinate to state law and constitutional protections.

A local rule cannot become its own source of unlimited authority merely because a governing body adopted it. Likewise, a statute or government policy cannot override a right protected by the United States Constitution.

The relevant questions are therefore not limited to what the city or county rules say. The story could also examine:

- Does state law authorize the identification requirement?
- Does refusing to state a name constitute a breach of the peace or disruption?
- What constitutional interests apply to anonymous political speech and petitioning government?
- What authority permits police to remove or threaten to arrest a peaceful person who is attempting to speak?
- Did officials consider those higher sources of law when adopting and enforcing the rules?

The city, county, police department, prosecutor, and legal counsel should each have an opportunity to explain their answers.

## **Why is this especially relevant in Hillsdale?**

Hillsdale is known far beyond the local community because of Hillsdale College and its emphasis on the United States Constitution, limited government, civic responsibility, and the principles of the American founding.

Hillsdale College alumni also serve on the City Council.

That background does not decide the legal dispute, but it gives the issue unusual local and public significance. A community internationally associated with constitutional education is now confronting a practical question about how constitutional principles apply inside its own government meetings.

The story would give current and former college students, local residents, public officials, and constitutional scholars an opportunity to consider whether the city's practices reflect the principles for which Hillsdale is widely known.

### **Why is this newsworthy?**

The incidents raise broader public-accountability questions:

- When may a local government require a speaker to identify himself or herself?
- May a citizen be prevented from speaking solely for declining to provide a name?
- Does declining to comply with an identification requirement constitute a disruption by itself?
- Is removal legally necessary, discretionary, or inappropriate when the person remains peaceful?
- Why was removal used at earlier meetings but rejected on July 20?
- Who determines whether removal or arrest is justified?
- What legal or prosecutorial advice was provided to the governing bodies or police?
- Were the applicable rules clearly written and consistently enforced?
- Did officials consider state law and constitutional protections before enforcing the rules?
- What procedural protections exist before a citizen is excluded from public comment or removed from an open meeting?

These questions affect more than one speaker or one political viewpoint. The same rules and enforcement decisions could be applied to any resident who wishes to criticize local government.

### **What supporting material is available?**

The relevant meetings, denials of public comment, and removals were recorded on video. Meeting rules, agendas, minutes, correspondence, police records, and the city's subsequent rule amendment can also be reviewed.

I am willing to provide the source material necessary to verify every factual statement included in the interview.

### **How could the story remain neutral?**

The interview could be conducted entirely in writing, using identical or comparable questions for:

- Me
- The Hillsdale mayor
- The council members who opposed removing me on July 20
- The Hillsdale city manager
- The Hillsdale city attorney
- The chair of the County Board of Commissioners
- The county prosecutor
- The Hillsdale City Police Department

The publication could also request independent analysis from a constitutional-law or First Amendment scholar who is not involved in the dispute.

Written responses would reduce misunderstandings and allow each person to state the specific factual and legal basis for their position.

The proposed story is not dependent on an editor reaching a conclusion about who is right. Its public value lies in documenting what happened, identifying who authorized the decisions, examining the legal hierarchy relied upon, exploring why enforcement differed between meetings, and allowing readers to evaluate the competing explanations.

Thank you for considering the proposal.

Lance Lashaway