

Proposed Written Interview

Anonymous Public Comment and Removal From Hillsdale Government Meetings

Background

This proposed interview concerns a series of Hillsdale City Council and Hillsdale County Board of Commissioners meetings at which Lance Lashaway attempted to participate in public comment without publicly stating his name.

The interview is intended to document what occurred, explain Lashaway's position, and identify the factual and legal questions that city and county officials may answer separately.

1. What is the central issue?

The central issue is whether a local government may prevent a peaceful citizen from speaking during public comment solely because the citizen declines to publicly state a name, and whether that refusal provides lawful grounds for removing the person from the meeting.

The events also raise a separate question about enforcement. Denying someone the opportunity to speak and physically removing that person from the meeting are two different government actions. The July 20 meeting demonstrated that the city could continue enforcing its identification rule without removing me from the room.

2. Why did you decline to state your name?

I believe citizens generally have a right to criticize and petition their government anonymously, particularly when their identity is not necessary to maintain order or administer the public-comment period.

My refusal was intended to assert that position and create a clear public record of how the city and county interpreted and enforced their identification rules.

I was not attempting to conceal my identity from officials. Many of them already knew who I was. The issue was whether the government could condition my ability to speak on publicly announcing my identity.

3. What happened at the May 4, 2026 City Council meeting?

I attempted to participate in public comment without stating my name.

City officials told me that identification was required. At that time, however, the written rule stated that a speaker's name was "requested."

I was not permitted to complete the public comment anonymously.

That incident raised a basic rule-enforcement question: Was the city enforcing the rule as it was actually written, or was it enforcing a requirement that had not yet been formally adopted?

4. What happened at the June 1 City Council meeting?

I again attempted to speak without publicly stating my name.

The council considered whether I should be permitted to speak. A motion to allow me to continue failed, and I was removed from the meeting.

Later during that same meeting, the council amended its rules by changing the identification language so that providing a name was expressly required.

The sequence is significant because the city first enforced the existing language as mandatory and then amended the rule to make it mandatory.

A neutral examination should determine what authority officials believed permitted the earlier enforcement and removal.

5. What happened at the June 23 County Board of Commissioners meeting?

I attempted to speak during public comment without stating my name.

The county maintained that its meeting rules required identification. I was denied the opportunity to speak and was removed by Hillsdale City Police.

Statements made during and after the incident indicated that advice attributed to police or the county prosecutor influenced the decision. I was also warned that repeating the conduct could result in criminal charges, arrest, or jail.

That raises questions about which official requested or authorized the removal, what legal authority was relied upon, and whether declining to state a name was treated as a disruption or criminal conduct.

6. What happened at the July 20 City Council meeting?

I again attempted to speak without stating my name.

By that time, the City Council had amended its rule to expressly require identification. The mayor enforced the amended rule and did not allow me to deliver my public comment.

Four council members pushed back and voted to allow me to speak. After the mayor and the city lawyer attempted to silence them, I was allowed to remain in the meeting.

I was still denied the opportunity to speak, but I remained peaceful, was not removed, and the meeting continued.

7. Why is the July 20 incident important?

It provides a direct comparison with the earlier removals.

On July 20, the city treated the identification rule as grounds to deny me the opportunity to speak, but not as automatic grounds to remove me from the meeting.

That distinction raises several questions:

- Was removal actually necessary to preserve order at the earlier meetings?
- Did my conduct constitute a breach of the peace, or was it simply noncompliance with a procedural rule?
- Was removal required by policy, or was it a discretionary decision?
- What objective standard determines when a denied speaker must also be removed?
- Why did four council members believe I should be allowed to speak on July 20?

8. Were you attempting to disrupt the meetings?

No.

My purpose was to participate in public comment and preserve a clear record of the government's response to my request to speak anonymously.

Officials may argue that continuing to assert my position after being instructed to provide my name interfered with the meeting. That argument should be included in any neutral story.

The relevant question is whether peaceful disagreement with a public-comment requirement constitutes an actual disruption or breach of the peace sufficient to justify removal.

9. Why not simply provide your name and challenge the rule later?

Providing my name would have eliminated the immediate controversy but would also have prevented a clear test of whether the identification requirement was being treated as a mandatory condition of speech.

The government's authority is most clearly documented when a citizen states the right being asserted, remains peaceful, and asks officials to identify the basis for denying it.

My position is that citizens should not necessarily be required to surrender a claimed right before they may challenge the government's restriction of that right.

10. What broader governmental principle is involved?

Local governments may adopt reasonable rules to maintain order and allocate speaking time. Those rules, however, exist within a legal hierarchy.

A local rule does not take precedence over state or federal law. A statute or government policy likewise remains subject to the United States Constitution.

The dispute therefore cannot be resolved solely by establishing that the city or county adopted an identification rule. The additional question is whether the rule, and the manner in which it was enforced, are consistent with applicable statutory and constitutional limitations.

11. Which constitutional principles do you believe are implicated?

My position is that the incidents implicate freedom of speech, the right to petition government, and the historical protection afforded to anonymous political expression.

The government may argue that public-comment identification is a reasonable procedural requirement in a limited public forum.

A balanced story should present both positions and seek independent analysis concerning the constitutional standards that govern public-comment restrictions.

12. Why is this especially relevant in Hillsdale?

Hillsdale is known nationally and internationally because of Hillsdale College and its emphasis on the Constitution, limited government, civic responsibility, and the principles of the American founding.

Hillsdale College alumni serve on the City Council.

That fact does not determine whether the city's rule is constitutional. It does, however, make the dispute especially relevant locally. A community closely associated with constitutional education is confronting a practical question about how constitutional principles apply inside its own government meetings.

This presents an opportunity to examine the difference between discussing constitutional principles in theory and applying them to an actual disagreement between citizens and local officials.

13. Are you asking the publication to take your side?

No.

I am asking the publication to document the events, examine the written rules, identify the legal authority claimed by officials, and provide each involved party an opportunity to explain its position.

The city, county, police department, prosecutor, and legal counsel should be able to explain:

- Why identification was required
- Why I was denied the opportunity to speak
- Why removal was used at some meetings but not on July 20
- What conduct officials considered disruptive
- What statutory or constitutional authority they relied upon
- What police or prosecutorial advice was provided
- What standards will govern future enforcement

Readers can then evaluate the competing positions.

14. What records support your account?

The relevant meetings were recorded on video.

Additional records include:

- City and county public-comment rules
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- The June 1 city rule amendment
- Correspondence with city and county officials
- Police reports and body-camera recordings
- Statements concerning prosecutorial or police advice
- Written warnings concerning possible arrest or criminal charges
- Records showing how officials responded at each meeting

These materials can be provided to the reporter for independent verification.

15. What do you hope the story accomplishes?

I want the public to understand how these decisions were made and what standards will be applied in the future.

The issue affects more than me. The same identification requirements and enforcement practices could be applied to any citizen, regardless of viewpoint, who wishes to criticize local government without publicly identifying himself or herself.

The public should know when a procedural rule may be used to deny speech, when noncompliance may lead to physical removal, and who is accountable for making those decisions.