

Congressional-Executive Commission on China
"A Son and Daughter's Appeal to Xi Jinping to Release Their Dad, Jimmy Lai"
Wednesday, September 16, 2026
Testimony by Sebastien Lai

Chairman Sullivan, Co-Chairman Smith, Members of the Commission — thank you.

My sister Claire was to testify beside me today. A few weeks ago, she was diagnosed with cancer. I was with her in London last week as she began chemotherapy. My father learned of his own daughter's diagnosis from a maximum-security prison. He cannot hold her hand. She wants nothing more than to have him with her for this fight. We hope the Chinese authorities will consider what compassionate release would mean for her, and for a 78-year-old man who has already suffered enough.

I want to thank America, President Trump, who has been a true champion of my father's, his administration, and the Senators and Members of both parties whose support has never wavered and only gotten stronger. That is moral courage, and my family does not take it for granted.

By the end of this year my father will have spent 6 years in a maximum-security prison in solitary. At 78 he is the oldest political prisoner in Hong Kong. With a 20 years sentence looming over him, if he's not freed soon, he will most likely die in prison.

But the real question is: for what? Three times in his life, my father has already paid dearly for freedom.

The first time, it cost him his childhood. He was a porter at the Guangzhou railway station when a traveller from Hong Kong tipped him a bar of chocolate. He figured that if this came from Hong Kong, Hong Kong must be heaven. At twelve, he hid in the bottom of a fishing boat to get there and for the first time in his life he tasted freedom

The second time, it cost him what many thought was his life's work. He started on a factory floor and ended up with a clothing empire. Then came Tiananmen. My father wrote what he thought of the men who ordered the massacre, and Beijing gave him a simple choice: your stores on the mainland, or your conscience. He sold the company, walking away from the largest market on earth and built a newspaper instead, on the principle that information is choice, and choice is freedom. Its first editorial asked: are we afraid of 1997? Of course we are. But we refuse to be intimidated by fear.

The third time, it cost him everything. In 2020, the National Security Law was imposed on Hong Kong by the Chinese government, criminalising, overnight, any form of democratic expression, past and present. So, sixty years after that fishing boat, my father again faced

the decision he had faced as a boy: to stay, or to run. Only now he had far more to lose by staying — and far more to protect. He stayed for our beliefs, and he stayed to protect others. That is the man they have in prison. What happens now is no longer a test of my father's courage, it is a test of ours.

America understands, in its bones, that freedom dies with the last man willing to defend it and that the cost of not standing up for liberty is not felt until it is too late. In my father, this nation has found a kindred spirit. A week from now, President Xi will be a guest in this city. Our appeal to him is simple: my father poses no threat. His imprisonment makes him a symbol of injustice; his death in prison would be a disgrace. Let Jimmy Lai come home to his family and let him sit beside his daughter in her hardest moment.