

World

Jimmy Lai's Daughter Pushing US to Help Free Hong Kong Activist



Claire Lai Photographer: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

By [Iain Marlow](#)

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The daughter of jailed Hong Kong democracy activist Jimmy Lai is pushing the Trump administration to help free her father, who was convicted late last year and has seen his health deteriorate during his incarceration.

“His health has gotten significantly worse over time,” Claire Lai, 29, said in an interview in Washington of her 78-year-old father.

Lai, who met her father in prison numerous times and left the city in June, is lobbying US lawmakers and meeting with officials. That includes seeing

Representative Brian Mast, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He wrote on X that Lai's conviction was a "kangaroo-court ruling."

The democracy advocate's legal team in Hong Kong urged a local court to grant him a lighter sentence as a result of advanced age, poor health and prolonged isolation since he was detained in 2020. His guilty verdict – of colluding with "foreign forces" to sanction Hong Kong and China – was condemned by the Group of Seven foreign ministers in December.

The arrest of the Hong Kong media tycoon, which has been raised by President Donald Trump and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, along with the shuttering of his Apple Daily newspaper, were key events in China's crackdown following pro-democracy protests that started in 2019.

"I spoke to President Xi about it, and I asked to consider his release," Trump said in December, referring to Chinese leader Xi Jinping. "He's an older man and he's not well, so I did put that request out. We'll see what happens."

Lai's daughter said she was "extremely grateful" to Trump and the administration's record freeing detainees "definitely gives us a cause to hope."



Jimmy Lai in 2021. Photographer: Chan Long Hei/Bloomberg

She said Lai, who is diabetic, has had high blood pressure and lost significant weight in jail. He's had debilitating heart palpitations and frequently suffers from rashes as a result of the heat and humidity in his cell, which has no air conditioning, she said.

Hong Kong's government has previously said Lai received "adequate and comprehensive" healthcare while in custody and that the city's laws have no provisions for a so-called medical parole.

While Trump said on the campaign that freeing Lai would be "easy," any diplomacy would be complicated given Beijing's frequent denunciations of Lai's role in the protests. At the same time, China has previously released high-profile foreigners, including two Canadians and an Australian – though none had Lai's prominence.

"One of the problems here is the issue of political prisoners is relatively new in Hong Kong, and they still have the veneer of rule of law," said Caoilfhionn Gallagher, a member of Lai's international legal team. "There's been a real

problem with the national security law cases happening in a speedy way. So the result of it has been five years of this very, very slow process.”

On Wednesday, China’s embassy in Washington emailed out a statement to rebut “several recurring misconceptions,” including that Lai’s case was an assault on press freedoms and Hong Kong’s autonomy. It said Lai was convicted for endangering national security and that his detention has been “secure, humane, appropriate, and conducive to health.”



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