

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

March 9, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

In honor of his decades-long work as a champion of human rights and the rule of law in East Asia, I write to respectfully recommend Professor Jerome Alan Cohen for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Professor Cohen is a rare living legend. As a professor, he created the field of East Asian legal studies and has helped shape how we understand China and East Asia in the United States. Over the course of his career, he has taught and mentored countless individuals across the United States and abroad.

Yet his work went beyond the classroom. Professor Cohen helped secure the release of numerous individuals detained by authoritarian regimes. Specifically, Professor Cohen was instrumental in securing the release of CIA officer Jack Downey from a life sentence in China and democracy activist and later Taiwanese Vice President Annette Lu. He also helped halt the execution of South Korean opposition leader and later President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Kim Dae-jung. In addition to securing the release of political prisoners, Professor Cohen has provided a home for scholars and advocates at risk of persecution at Harvard and NYU, offering a vital outlet for human rights activists from East Asia.

His influence has also been felt at the highest levels of government. Professor Cohen was a key player in the establishment of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. He chaired a committee whose work served as the basis for President Nixon's initial overtures to Beijing and he arranged for a key visit by Senator Ted Kennedy in 1977. But while pursuing a diplomatic opening, he also maintained a focus on accountability and human rights. After Tiananmen Square, he returned to academia and dedicated himself to advocating for human rights and freedom in China. More recently, as China has grown increasingly authoritarian, his voice has only become louder, especially on the Chinese government's dismantling of the rule of law in Hong Kong and its increased oppression on the mainland – particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet.

In 2020, when Professor Cohen turned 90, Taiwan awarded him one of its highest honors, the Order of the Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon, for his contribution to the development of human rights and the rule of law there. Two years prior, Japan presented the Order of the Rising Sun with Gold Rays and Neck Ribbon for his dedication to U.S.-Japan relations. It is time that the United States similarly recognize Professor Cohen's contributions to re-shaping U.S.-China relations and his advocacy for human rights, rule of law, and democracy in Asia.

I am honored to recommend Professor Cohen for his incredible contributions to American understanding of East Asia, his relentless fight for justice and human rights abroad, and his work over many decades to protect and aid those engaged on the front lines of those struggles. I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



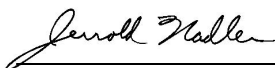
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator