



The mayoral debate held at Cal State LA on Sunday was planned as a production for broadcast television that millions could view or stream in real time. The event was not a public forum and was not promoted or advertised as an event the public could attend in person. This decision allowed organizers to focus on supporting the live broadcast, rather than designing and implementing a large audience event in a small venue that at its fullest would not have accommodated every person who sought to attend. Because the debate was broadcast live and live-streamed, everyone with a cellphone or a TV could watch the debate. At no point did organizers advise classes or faculty to simply show up at the venue. The event organizers, the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State LA, ABC7, and the League of Women Voters of Greater Los Angeles, have a long history of holding well-organized events at Cal State LA that educate and inform the public.

Strict registration and check-in processes were in place for the media and for a very limited number of guests. This included a registration requirement days in advance, on-site check-in, distribution of identifying badges and guest tickets, a mask requirement, and on-site COVID-19 vaccination checks. Media and guests were required to show identification and proof of vaccination to receive a wristband indicating compliance. Those invited to attend included a small number of staff and guests designated by the partnering organizations, several guests of the candidates, and university staff and volunteers. Cal State LA students from student government (Associated Students, Inc.) and others participated as guests and volunteers, and two student reporters were present. There were to be no questions from the audience. Inside the theatre, seats were designated for media representatives or for guests. Space was intentionally left open between guests and groups of guests for health purposes in light of the ongoing pandemic.

Professor Melina Abdullah and her companion were not on the guest or media list for the event. They bypassed all on-site check-ins and entered the theatre. An event organizer informed the pair twice that they could not remain. The two did not leave. When public safety officers asked them to leave, Professor Abdullah's companion complied. When Professor Abdullah ignored requests to leave, she was removed from the building by public safety officers and immediately released. Professor Abdullah's race and group affiliation were not factors in this incident. Others who were not on the media or guest lists were not allowed into the theatre.

Spaces on campus are routinely reserved or rented for use by student groups, other members of our community, as well as outside entities, for ticketed, registration-based, or invitation-based events. There should not be an expectation that any event held at a public university is open to everyone who wants to attend—whether the event is a concert, a classroom lecture, or a debate.

The incident before the debate was unfortunate; however, it did not disrupt the event. Viewers were able to hear the candidates discuss the weighty challenges that confront our city at this critical juncture.