

To: American Academy of Forensic Sciences, American Criminal Justice Association, American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors, Association of Firearm and Tool Mark Examiners, California Narcotic Officers' Association, Federal Criminal Investigators Association, Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, Fraternal Order of Police, International Association for Identification, International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysts, International Association of Chiefs of Police, International Association of Women Police, International Crime Scene Investigator's Association, Massachusetts Association of Women in Law Enforcement, National Asian Peace Officers' Association, National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, National Association of Police Organizations, The National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives, National Black Police Association, National Criminal Justice Honor Society, National Latino Peace Officers Association, The National Organization of Black Women in Law Enforcement, National Sheriffs' Association, Same Shield, The United Deputy Sheriffs' Association, Women in Federal Law Enforcement, The Young Forensic Scientists Forum

Oct. 30, 2020

Dear law enforcement leaders,

It is no secret that 2020 has been a unique and challenging year for all of us. Law enforcement professionals and journalists alike face new and greater challenges and more scrutiny than ever before.

We understand and respect the difficult job you are required to do every day. We see it up close. The scenes and situations that demand so much of your attention are often the same as ours. We both have obligations, through our professions, to the American public: Yours is to protect. Ours is to inform.

Yet our profession is the only one explicitly named and protected in the U.S. Constitution. Despite the time-tested First Amendment, law enforcement authorities nationwide have been targeting and arresting journalists with alarming frequency in recent years, and especially during this year's protests.

As a leader in one of dozens of law enforcement organizations in the U.S., you have the power to change this. You can influence the attitudes and actions of your members. You can ask them to refrain from arresting journalists — and if and when journalists have been arrested, you can ask prosecutors to drop charges against them. We the people are less able to govern ourselves absent the ability to know what is going on in our society. And journalists are instrumental in making sure that Americans stay informed.

Our request is not politically motivated in any way. It is troubling that journalists can't do their jobs without fear of harassment, violence or arrest, or that charges against them aren't dropped as quickly as possible once the facts are sorted out. For centuries under the First Amendment, law enforcement officers and journalists have both been able to do their respective jobs without fear of conflict or harassment. We echo the sentiments of a [letter 32 journalism groups signed in June](#): You must persuade your colleagues,

commanders and chiefs, and the mayors and governors who direct them, to halt the deliberate and devastating targeting of journalists in the field.

We urge you to speak out against the arrests of journalists in the field and to encourage better officer training. We would be happy to discuss all of these issues with you in further detail or take part in any training or discussions about best practices. The signers of this letter represent print, broadcast and online journalists, photojournalists, editors, directors and managers. If you're interested in speaking to one or more of these groups, please email [communications@spj.org](mailto:communications@spj.org) or call 317-361-4134.

When journalists tell the stories of the communities your members protect and serve, they tell the stories of your officers as well. There must be a way for both law enforcement officials and journalists to do their respective jobs. Respectfully, all journalists need to do their work without any officers stifling it.

Sincerely,

Society of Professional Journalists  
American Society of Journalists and Authors  
Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association  
Asian American Journalists Association  
Associated Collegiate Press  
Brechtner Center for Freedom of Information  
Center for Scholastic Journalism, Kent State University  
Colorado Press Women  
Education Writers Association  
International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors  
Journalism Education Association  
Michigan State University  
National Association of Black Journalists  
National Federation of Press Women  
National Press Photographers Association  
National Scholastic Press Association  
National Society of Newspaper Columnists  
Native American Journalists Association  
New York Press Club  
North American Agricultural Journalists  
Project Censored and the Media Freedom Foundation  
Religion News Association  
Society for Advancing Business Editing and Writing  
Society of American Travel Writers  
Student Press Law Center  
Tully Center for Free Speech