

Reporters Committee provides free 24-hour legal aid to reporters covering presidential inauguration events

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press is standing by to provide reporters covering the Presidential Inauguration in Washington, D.C., with a 24-hour **NEWS MEDIA HOTLINE** offering cost-free legal assistance, particularly in situations where reporters are arrested while covering protests or disturbances. The telephone number of the media hotline is (703) 807-2100 (a local call in the Washington area).

Disturbances at political events in the past have sometimes resulted in mass arrests during which reporters have been taken into custody. While officials do not seem to expect protests on the scale of those seen at this summer's political conventions, the Reporters Committee nonetheless wants to minimize problems reporters may face in the event of mass demonstrations or other unusual occurrences during the four days of events. Please follow the guidelines below in the event of a demonstration or disturbance.

Access. Officials have made clear that only reporters, camera crews, photographers and other media personnel with proper credentials will be allowed into many restricted areas. Do not expect to enter any areas in the vicinity of the swearing-in, parade, or other events that are closed by D.C. Police for security reasons, and do not walk directly through a police line.

Arrest and detention. In the event you are taken into custody during a disturbance, tell the arresting officer immediately that you are a news reporter and show any credentials you may have. The D.C. Police are accustomed to working with reporters, and will make an effort not to interfere with working journalists, provided that the journalists have not committed separate infractions such as disorderly conduct or harassment and have cooperated with police procedures. Identifying yourself as a news reporter should facilitate your release if you are caught up in a mass arrest. All officers on the street will be working with a unit commander, to whom you should also try to identify yourself.

If a camera, film, videotape, memory card or other newsgathering materials have been confiscated, be sure to *politely* inform police of any steps necessary to preserve that material. Most police officials know that they cannot lawfully destroy or otherwise ruin such materials.

If you are charged with a minor infraction, such as disorderly conduct or disturbing the peace, the police may issue you a citation telling you when to appear in court, and release you on your own recognizance. If that happens, you may call the hotline if you need assistance in responding to the citation at the appropriate date. Police are more likely to release you with a citation if you have a local address, or at least a local business affiliation and address. If you are a freelancer, carrying documentation of your assignment from a publication may help.

In the event you are not given an appearance ticket, your detention may be longer and you may have to appear before a judge for an arraignment, at which time the judge will release you on your own recognizance or set bail. The amount of the bail depends on the seriousness of the offense. Bail bonding companies are available to assist

with bail, and you should carry a minimum of \$50 to \$100 to secure a bail bond if necessary.

In any case, detention will obviously interfere with your ability to cover the news events. Journalists who do not respond to police orders, even ones they feel are unjust or improper, may prevail in the end but at the price of missing the story they wanted to cover. Officials will not expedite the processing of your case just because you are a journalist.

Representation. If your news organization has not arranged for legal representation, or calls to your organization are unproductive, you may also call the hotline for assistance in connection with your arraignment and securing your release. Due to the expected chaotic atmosphere surrounding inaugural events — not to mention the road and bridge closures — actually getting an attorney to appear for you may be difficult, and cannot be guaranteed.

In many cases, individuals held for arraignment in D.C. do not have the opportunity to use a telephone. When you are taken to court, you can ask court officials or the judge if one of our attorneys is available (see below).

If you work for a news organization, please be sure to contact your organization first — the Reporters Committee does not want to interfere with procedures your employer may wish to follow concerning legal representation.

Other Information. The Reporters Committee's legal assistance hotline is available, like it has been for four decades, to provide assistance to reporters. This service will be available to all journalists, broadly defined. While you will have an easier time dealing with authorities if you have proper media credentials, that is not a requirement for using the hotline. *We cannot offer assistance in getting press credentials during the inauguration period, or for problems unrelated to news coverage.*

If you are taken into custody and unable to call the hotline, try to inform a colleague, employer or somebody else who will be able to contact the hotline for you.

When calling the hotline after you have been arrested, please identify yourself as a journalist and indicate that it is an emergency. Also, be sure to specify whether you are requesting emergency assistance or merely seeking advice.

Attorneys and phone numbers. Try the Reporters Committee's 24-hour number first: (703) 807-2100. You may also want to try calling the cell phones of **Lucy Dalglish** at (301) 379-5619, or **Gregg Leslie** at (202) 997-1912.

You may have to leave a message at these numbers, particularly at night or over the weekend. Be sure to leave your name and any information you know related to where you are being held and when you are to appear in court.

If you have any questions or comments about the hotline, contact Lucy Dalglish, Executive Director of the Reporters Committee at (703) 807-2100.