

REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE: WISCONSIN

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

*A chapter from our comprehensive compendium of information
on the reporter's privilege —the right not to be compelled
to testify or disclose sources and information in court —
in each state and federal circuit.*

The complete project can be viewed at
www.rcfp.org/privilege

Credits & Copyright

This project was initially made possible by a generous grant from the Phillip L. Graham Fund.

Published by The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

Executive Director: Lucy A. Dalglish

Editors: Gregg P. Leslie, Elizabeth Soja, Wendy Tannenbaum, Monica Dias, Dan Bischof

Copyright 2002-2010 by The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, 1101 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1100, Arlington, VA 22209. Phone: (703) 807-2100 Email: rcfp@rcfp.org. All rights reserved.

Reproduction rights in individual state and federal circuit outlines are held jointly by the author of the outline and The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. Rights for the collective work and other explanatory and introductory material are held by the Reporters Committee.

Educational uses. Those wishing to reproduce parts of this work for educational and nonprofit uses can do so freely if they meet the following conditions. *Educational institutions:* No charge is passed on to students, other than the direct cost of reproducing pages. *Nonprofit groups:* No fee is charged for the seminar or other meeting where this will be distributed, other than to cover direct expenses of the seminar. *Distribution:* This license is meant to cover distribution of printed copies of parts of this work. It should not be reproduced in another publication or posted to a Web site. Those needing to provide Web access can post links directly to the project on the Reporters Committee's site: <http://www.rcfp.org/privilege>

All other uses. Those wishing to reproduce materials from this work should contact the Reporters Committee to negotiate a reprint fee based on the amount of information and number of copies distributed.

Reprints. This document will be available in various printed forms soon. Please check back for updates, or contact the Reporters Committee for more information.

The Reporter's Privilege Compendium: An Introduction

Since the first edition of this guide was published in 2002, it would be difficult to say that things have gotten better for reporters faced with subpoenas. Judith Miller spent 85 days in jail in 2005 for refusing to disclose her sources in the controversy over the outing of CIA operative Valerie Plame. Freelance videographer Josh Wolf was released after 226 days in jail for refusing to testify about what he saw at a political protest. And at the time of this writing, former *USA Today* reporter Toni Locy is appealing her contempt conviction, which was set to cost her as much as \$5,000 a day, for not revealing her sources for a story on the anthrax investigations.

This recent round of controversies underscores a problem that journalists have faced for decades: give up your source or pay the price: either jail or heavy fines. Most states and federal circuits have some sort of reporter's privilege—the right to refuse to testify—that allows journalists to keep their sources confidential. But in every jurisdiction, the parameters of that right are different. Sometimes, the privilege is based on a statute enacted by the legislature—a shield law. In others, courts have found the privilege based on a constitutional right. Some privileges cover non-confidential information, some don't. Freelancers are covered in some states, but not others.

In addition, many reporters don't work with attorneys who are familiar with this topic. Even attorneys who handle a newspaper's libel suits may not be familiar with the law on the reporter's privilege in the state. Because of these difficulties, reporters and their lawyers often don't have access to the best information on how to fight a subpoena. The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press decided that something could be done about this, and thus this project was born. Compiled by lawyers who have handled these cases and helped shape the law in their states and federal circuits, this guide is meant to help both journalists who want to know more about the reporter's privilege and lawyers who need to know the ins and outs of getting a subpoena quashed.

Journalists should note that reading this guide is not meant as a substitute for working with a licensed attorney in your state when you try to have a subpoena quashed. You should always consult an attorney before trying to negotiate with a party who wants to obtain your testimony or when appearing in court to get a subpoena quashed or testifying. If your news organization does not have an attorney, or if you are not affiliated with an established organization, the Reporters Committee can help you try to find an attorney in your area.

Above the law?

Outside of journalism circles, the reporter's privilege suffers from an image problem. Critics often look at reporter's shield laws and think that journalists are declaring that they are "above the law," violating the understood standard that a court is entitled to "every man's evidence," as courts themselves often say.

But courts have always recognized the concept of "privileges," allowing certain individuals to refuse to testify, out of an acknowledgment that there are societal interests that can trump the demand for all evidence. Journalists need to emphasize to both the courts and the public that they are not above the law, but that instead they must be able to remain independent, so that they can maintain their traditional role as neutral watchdogs and objective observers. When reporters are called into court to testify for or against a party, their credibility is harmed. Potential sources come to see them as agents

of the state, or supporters of criminal defendants, or as advocates for one side or the other in civil disputes.

Critics also contend that exempting journalists from the duty to testify will be detrimental to the administration of justice, and will result in criminals going free for a lack of evidence. But 35 states and the District of Columbia have shield laws, and the Department of Justice imposes restrictions on federal agents and prosecutors who wish to subpoena journalists, and yet there has been no indication that the courts have stopped working or that justice has suffered.

Courts in Maryland, in fact, have managed to function with a reporter's shield law for more than a century. In 1896, after a reporter was jailed for refusing to disclose a source, a Baltimore journalists' club persuaded the General Assembly to enact legislation that would protect them from having to reveal sources' identities in court. The statute has been amended a few times—mainly to cover more types of information and include broadcast journalists once that medium was created. But the state has never had the need to rescind the protection.

And the privilege made news internationally in December 2002 when the appeals court of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal decided that a qualified reporter's privilege should be applied to protect war correspondents from being forced to provide evidence in prosecutions before the tribunal.

The hows & whys of the reporter's privilege

In the course of gathering news, journalists frequently rely on confidential sources. Many sources claim that they will be subject to retribution for exposing matters of public importance to the press unless their identity remains confidential.

Doctor-patient, lawyer-client and priest-penitent relationships have long been privileged, allowing recipients to withhold confidential information learned in their professional capacity. However, the reporter's privilege is much less developed, and journalists are frequently asked to reveal confidential sources and information they have obtained during newsgathering to attorneys, the government and courts. These "requests" usually come from attorneys for the government or private litigants as demands called subpoenas.

In the most recent phase of a five-year study on the incidence of subpoenas served on the news media, *Agents of Discovery*, The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press reported that 1,326 subpoenas were served on 440 news organizations in 1999. Forty-six percent of all news media responding said they received at least one subpoena during 1999.

In criminal cases, prosecutors argue that reporters, like other citizens, are obligated to provide relevant evidence concerning the commission of a crime. Criminal defendants argue that a journalist has information that is essential to their defense, and that the Sixth Amendment right to a fair trial outweighs any First Amendment right that the reporter may have. Civil litigants may have no constitutional interest to assert, but will argue that nevertheless they are entitled to all evidence relevant to their case.

When reporters challenge subpoenas, they argue that they must be able to promise confidentiality in order to obtain information on matters of public importance. Forced disclosure of confidential or unpublished sources and information will cause individuals to re-

fuse to talk to reporters, resulting in a "chilling effect" on the free flow of information and the public's right to know.

When asked to produce their notes, documents, or other unpublished material obtained during news gathering, journalists argue that these subpoenas intrude on the editorial process, and thus violate their First Amendment right to speak without fear of state interference. Some litigants who request information from the media are simply lazy. Rather than investigating to find appropriate witnesses, these litigants find it simpler and cheaper to compel journalists to reveal their sources or to hand over information.

But journalists also have legitimate reasons to oppose subpoenas over published, non-confidential information. Responding to such subpoenas consumes staff time and resources that should be used for reporting and editing.

If a court challenge to a subpoena is not resolved in the reporter's favor, he or she is caught between betraying a source or risking a contempt of court citation, which most likely will include a fine or jail time.

Most journalists feel an obligation to protect their confidential sources even if threatened with jail time. When appeals have been exhausted, the decision to reveal a source is a difficult question of journalism ethics, further complicated by the possibility that a confidential source whose identity is revealed may try to sue the reporter and his or her news organization under a theory of promissory estoppel, similar to breach of contract. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that such suits do not violate the First Amendment rights of the media. (*Cohen v. Cowles Media Co.*, 501 U.S. 663 (1991))

The sources of the reporter's privilege

First Amendment protection. The U.S. Supreme Court last considered a constitutionally based reporter's privilege in 1972 in *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S. 665 (1972). Justice Byron White, joined by three other justices, wrote the opinion for the Court, holding that the First Amendment does not protect a journalist who has actually witnessed criminal activity from revealing his or her information to a grand jury. However a concurring opinion by Justice Lewis Powell and a dissenting opinion by Justice Potter Stewart recognized a qualified privilege for reporters. The privilege as described by Stewart weighs the First Amendment rights of reporters against the subpoenaing party's need for disclosure. When balancing these interests, courts should consider whether the information is relevant and material to the party's case, whether there is a compelling and overriding interest in obtaining the information, and whether the information could be obtained from any source other than the media. In some cases, courts require that a journalist show that he or she promised a source confidentiality.

Two other justices joined Justice Stewart's dissent. These four justices together with Justice William O. Douglas, who also dis-

sent from the Court's opinion and said that the First Amendment provided journalists with almost complete immunity from being compelled to testify before grand juries, gave the qualified privilege issue a majority. Although the high court has not revisited the issue, almost all the federal circuits and many state courts have acknowledged at least some form of a qualified constitutional privilege.

However, some courts, including the federal appeals court in New Orleans (5th Cir.), have recently interpreted *Branzburg* as holding that the First Amendment protects the media from subpoenas only when the subpoenas are being used to harass the press. (*United States v. Smith*, 135 F.3d 963 (5th Cir. 1998)).

State constitutions, common law and court rules. Many states have recognized a reporter's privilege based on state law. For example, New York's highest court recognized a qualified reporter's privilege under its own state constitution, protecting both confidential and non-confidential materials. (*O'Neill v. Oakgrove Construction Inc.*, 71 N.Y.S.2d 521 (1988)). Others states base a reporter's privilege on common law. Before the state enacted a shield law in 2007, the Supreme Court in Washington state recognized a qualified reporter's privilege in civil cases, later extending it to criminal trials. (*Senear v. Daily Journal-American*, 97 Wash.2d 148, 641 P.2d 1180 (1982), *on remand*, 8 Media L. Rep. 2489 (Wash. Super. Ct. 1982)). And in a third option, courts can create their own rules of procedure. The Utah Supreme Court adopted a reporter's privilege in its court rules in 2008, as did the New Mexico high court years before.

Even in the absence of an applicable shield law or court-recognized privilege, journalists occasionally have been successful in persuading courts to quash subpoenas based on generally-applicable protections such as state and federal rules of evidence, which allow the quashing of subpoenas for information that is not relevant or where the effort to produce it would be too cumbersome.

Statutory protection. In addition to case law, 35 states and the District of Columbia have enacted statutes —shield laws —that give journalists some form of privilege against compelled production of confidential or unpublished information. The laws vary in detail and scope from state to state, but generally give greater protection to journalists than the state or federal constitution, according to many courts.

However, shield laws usually have specific limits that exclude some journalists or certain material from coverage. For instance, many of the statutes define "journalist" in a way that only protects those who work full-time for a newspaper or broadcast station. Freelance writers, book authors, Internet journalists, and many others are left in the cold, and have to rely on the First Amendment for protection. Broad exceptions for eyewitness testimony or for libel defendants also can remove protection from journalists, even though these situations often show the greatest need for a reporter's privilege.

The Reporter's Privilege Compendium: Questions and Answers

What is a subpoena?

A subpoena is a notice that you have been called to appear at a trial, deposition or other court proceeding to answer questions or to supply specified documents. A court may later order you to do so and impose a sanction if you fail to comply.

Do I have to respond to a subpoena?

In a word, yes.

Ignoring a subpoena is a bad idea. Failure to respond can lead to charges of contempt of court, fines, and in some cases, jail time. Even a court in another state may, under some circumstances, have authority to order you to comply with a subpoena.

What are my options?

Your first response to a subpoena should be to discuss it with an attorney if at all possible. Under no circumstances should you comply with a subpoena without first consulting a lawyer. It is imperative that your editor or your news organization's legal counsel be advised as soon as you have been served.

Sometimes the person who subpoenaed you can be persuaded to withdraw it. Some attorneys use subpoenas to conduct "fishing expeditions," broad nets cast out just to see if anything comes back. When they learn that they will have to fight a motion to quash their subpoenas, lawyers sometimes drop their demands altogether or agree to settle for less than what they originally asked for, such as an affidavit attesting to the accuracy of a story rather than in-court testimony.

Some news organizations, particularly broadcasters whose aired videotape is subpoenaed, have deflected burdensome demands by agreeing to comply, but charging the subpoenaing party an appropriate fee for research time, tape duplication and the like.

If the person who subpoenaed you won't withdraw it, you may have to fight the subpoena in court. Your lawyer will file a motion to quash, which asks the judge to rule that you don't have to comply with the subpoena.

If the court grants your motion, you're off the hook —unless that order is itself appealed. If your motion isn't granted, the court will usually order you to comply, or at the very least to disclose the demanded materials to the court so the judge may inspect them and determine whether any of the materials must be disclosed to the party seeking them. That order can itself be appealed to a higher court. If all appeals are unsuccessful, you could face sanctions if you continue to defy the court's order. Sanctions may include fines imposed on your station or newspaper or on you personally, or imprisonment.

In many cases a party may subpoena you only to intimidate you, or gamble that you will not exercise your rights. By consulting a lawyer and your editors, you can decide whether to seek to quash the subpoena or to comply with it. This decision should be made with full knowledge of your rights under the First Amendment, common law, state constitution or statute.

They won't drop it. I want to fight it. Do I have a chance?

This is a complicated question.

If your state has a shield law, your lawyer must determine whether it will apply to you, to the information sought and to the type of proceeding involved. Even if your state does not have a shield law, or if your situation seems to fall outside its scope, the state's courts may have recognized some common law or constitu-

tional privilege that will protect you. Each state is different, and many courts do not recognize the privilege in certain situations.

Whether or not a statutory or other privilege protects you in a particular situation may depend on a number of factors. For example, some shield laws provide absolute protection in some circumstances, but most offer only a qualified privilege. A qualified privilege generally creates a presumption that you will not have to comply with a subpoena, but it can be overcome if the subpoenaing party can show that information in your possession is essential to the case, goes to the heart of the matter before the court, and cannot be obtained from an alternative, non-journalist source.

Some shield laws protect only journalists who work full-time for a newspaper, news magazine, broadcaster or cablecaster. Freelancers, book authors, scholarly researchers and other "non-professional" journalists may not be covered by some statutes.

Other factors that may determine the scope of the privilege include whether the underlying proceeding is criminal or civil, whether the identity of a confidential source or other confidential information is involved, and whether you or your employer is already a party to the underlying case, such as a defendant in a libel suit.

The decision to fight may not be yours alone. The lawyer may have to consider your news organization's policy for complying with subpoenas and for revealing unpublished information or source names. If a subpoena requests only published or broadcast material, your newspaper or station may elect to turn over copies of these materials without dispute. If the materials sought are unpublished, such as notes or outtakes, or concern confidential sources, it is unlikely that your employer has a policy to turn over these materials —at least without first contesting the subpoena.

Every journalist should be familiar with his or her news organization's policy on retaining notes, tapes and drafts of articles. You should follow the rules and do so consistently. If your news organization has no formal policy, talk to your editors about establishing one. Never destroy notes, tapes, drafts or other documents once you have been served with a subpoena.

In some situations, your news organization may not agree that sources or materials should be withheld, and may try to persuade you to reveal the information. If the interests of the organization differ from yours, it may be appropriate for you to seek separate counsel.

Can a judge examine the information before ordering me to comply with a subpoena?

Some states require or at least allow judges to order journalists to disclose subpoenaed information to them before revealing it to the subpoenaing party. This process, called *in camera* review, allows a judge to examine all the material requested and determine whether it is sufficiently important to the case to justify compelled production. The state outlines will discuss what is required or allowed in your state.

Does federal or state law apply to my case?

A majority of the subpoenas served on reporters arise in state cases, with only eight percent coming in federal cases, according to the Reporters Committee's 1999 subpoena survey, *Agents of Discovery*.

State trial courts follow the interpretation of state constitutional, statutory or common law from the state's highest court to address the issue. When applying a First Amendment privilege, state courts may rely on the rulings of the United States Supreme Court as well as the state's highest court.

Subpoenas in cases brought in federal courts present more complicated questions. Each state has at least one federal court. When a federal district court is asked to quash a subpoena, it may apply federal law, the law of the state in which the federal court sits, or even the law of another state. For example, if a journalist from one state is subpoenaed to testify in a court in another state, the enforcing court will apply the state's "choice of law" rules to decide which law applies.

Federal precedent includes First Amendment or federal common law protection as interpreted by the United States Supreme Court, rulings of the federal circuit court of appeals for the district court's circuit, or earlier decisions by that same district court. There is no federal shield law, although as of May 2008 a bill had passed the House and was moving to the Senate floor.

The federal district court will apply the state courts' interpretation of state law in most circumstances. In the absence of precedent from the state's courts, the federal district court will follow prior federal court interpretations of the state's law. In actions involving both federal and state law, courts differ on whether federal or state law will apply.

Twelve federal circuits cover the United States. Each circuit has one circuit (appellate) court, and a number of district (trial) courts. The circuit courts must follow precedent established by the U.S. Supreme Court, but are not bound by other circuits' decisions.

Are there any limits on subpoenas from federal agents or prosecutors?

Ever since 1973, the Attorney General of the United States has followed a set of guidelines limiting the circumstances in which any agents or employees of the Department of Justice, including federal prosecutors and FBI agents, may issue subpoenas to members of the news media or subpoena journalists' telephone records from third parties. (28 C.F.R. 50.10)

Under the guidelines, prosecutors and agents must obtain permission from the Attorney General before subpoenaing a member of the news media. Generally, they must exhaust alternative sources for information before doing so. The guidelines encourage negotiation with the news media to avoid unnecessary conflicts, and specify that subpoenas should not be used to obtain "peripheral, nonessential or speculative" information.

In addition, journalists should not be questioned or arrested by Justice employees without the prior approval of the Attorney General (unless "exigent circumstances preclude prior approval") and agents are not allowed to seek an arrest warrant against a journalist or present evidence to a grand jury against a journalist without the same approval.

Employees who violate these guidelines may receive an administrative reprimand, but violation does not automatically render the subpoena invalid or give a journalist the right to sue the Justice Department.

The guidelines do not apply to government agencies that are not part of the federal Department of Justice. Thus agencies like the National Labor Relations Board are not required to obtain the Attorney General's permission before serving a subpoena upon a member of the news media.

Do the news media have any protection against search warrants?

Subpoenas are not the only tool used to obtain information from the news media. Sometimes police and prosecutors use search warrants, allowing investigators to enter newsrooms and search for evidence directly rather than merely demanding that journalists release it.

The U.S. Supreme Court held that such searches do not violate the First Amendment. *Zurcher v. Stanford Daily*, 436 U.S. 547 (1978). Congress responded by passing the federal Privacy Protection Act in 1980. (42 U.S.C. 2000aa)

In general, the Act prohibits both federal and state officers and employees from searching or seizing journalists' "work product" or "documentary materials" in their possession. The Act provides limited exceptions that allow the government to search for certain types of national security information, child pornography, evidence that the journalists themselves have committed a crime, or materials that must be immediately seized to prevent death or serious bodily injury. "Documentary materials" may also be seized if there is reason to believe that they would be destroyed in the time it took to obtain them using a subpoena, or if a court has ordered disclosure, the news organization has refused and all other remedies have been exhausted.

Even though the Privacy Protection Act applies to state law enforcement officers as well as federal authorities, many states, including California, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas and Washington, have their own statutes providing similar or even greater protection. (*See section IX.A. in the state outlines.*) Other states, such as Wisconsin, require that search warrants for documents be directed only at parties suspected of being "concerned in the commission" of a crime, which generally exempts journalists.

If law enforcement officers appear with a warrant and threaten to search your newsroom unless you hand over specific materials to them, contact your organization's attorney *immediately*. Ask the officers to delay the search until you have had an opportunity to confer with your lawyer. If the search proceeds, staff photographers or a camera crew should record it.

Although the news organization staff may not impede the search, they are not required to assist with it. But keep in mind that the warrant will probably list specific items to be seized, and you may decide it is preferable to turn over a particular item rather than to allow police to ransack desks and file cabinets or seize computers.

After the search is over, immediately consult your attorney about filing a suit in either federal or state court. It is important to move quickly, because you may be able to obtain emergency review by a judge in a matter of hours. This could result in your seized materials being taken from the law enforcement officials and kept under seal until the dispute is resolved.

Another option allows you to assert your claim in an administrative proceeding, which may eventually lead to sanctions against the official who violated the act. You would not receive damages, however. Your attorney can help you decide which forum will offer the best remedy in your situation.

Whichever option you choose, a full hearing will vindicate your rights in nearly every case, and you will be entitled to get your materials back, and in some cases, monetary damages including your attorney's fees.

The Reporter's Privilege Compendium: A User's Guide

This project is the most detailed examination available of the reporter's privilege in every state and federal circuit. It is presented primarily as an Internet document (found at www.rcfp.org/privilege) for greater flexibility in how it can be used. Printouts of individual state and circuit chapters are made available for readers' convenience.

Every state and federal section is based on the same standard outline. The outline starts with the basics of the privilege, then the procedure and law for quashing a subpoena, and concludes with appeals and a handful of other issues.

There will be some variations on the standard outline from state to state. Some contributors added items within the outline, or omitted subpoints found in the complete outline which were not relevant to that state's law. Each change was made to fit the needs of a particular state's laws and practices.

For our many readers who are not lawyers. This project is primarily here to allow lawyers to fight subpoenas issued to journalists, but it is also designed to help journalists understand the reporter's privilege. (Journalists should *not* assume that use of this book will take the place of consulting an attorney before dealing with a subpoena. You should contact a lawyer if you have been served with a subpoena.) Although the guides were written by lawyers, we hope they are useful to and readable by nonlawyers as well. However, some of the elements of legal writing may be unfamiliar to lay readers. A quick overview of some of these customs should suffice to help you over any hurdles.

Lawyers are trained to give a legal citation for most statements of law. The name of a court case or number of a statute may therefore be tacked on to the end of a sentence. This may look like a sentence fragment, or may leave you wondering if some information about that case was omitted. Nothing was left out; inclusion of a legal citation provides a reference to the case or statute sup-

porting the statement and provides a shorthand method of identifying that authority, should you need to locate it.

Legal citation form also indicates where the law can be found in official reporters or other legal digests. Typically, a cite to a court case will be followed by the volume and page numbers of a legal reporter. Most state cases will be found in the state reporter, a larger regional reporter, or both. A case cite reading 123 F.2d 456 means the case could be found in the Federal Reports, second series, volume 123, starting at page 456. In most states, the cites will be to the official reporter of state court decisions or to the West Publishers regional reporter that covers that state.

Note that the complete citation for a case is often given only once, and subsequent cites look like this: "*Jackson* at 321." This means that the author is referring you to page 321 of a case cited earlier that includes the name Jackson. Because this outlines were written for each state, yet searches and comparisons result in various states and sections being taken out of the sequence in which they were written, it may not always be clear what these second references refer to. Authors may also use the words *supra* or *infra* to refer to a discussion of a case appearing earlier or later in the outline, respectively. You may have to work backwards through that state's outline to find the first reference in some cases.

We have encouraged the authors to avoid "legalese" to make this guide more accessible to everyone. But many of the issues are necessarily technical and procedural, and removing all the legalese would make the guides less useful to lawyers who are trying to get subpoenas quashed.

Updates. This project was first posted to the Web in December 2002. The last major update of all chapters was completed in September 2007. As the outlines are updated, the copyright notice on the bottom of the page will reflect the date of the update. All outlines will not be updated on the same schedule.

REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE COMPENDIUM

WISCONSIN

Prepared by:

Robert J. Dreps
 James A. Friedman
 Jennifer L. Peterson
 Godfrey & Kahn, S.C.
 One East Main Street, Suite 500
 P.O. Box 2719
 Madison, WI 53701-2719
 Phone: 608-257-3911
 Fax: 608-257-0609

I. Introduction: History & Background.....	2	V. Procedures for issuing and contesting subpoenas.....	4
II. Authority for and source of the right.....	2	A. What subpoena server must do	4
A. Shield law statute	2	B. How to Quash	5
B. State constitutional provision	2	VI. Substantive law on contesting subpoenas	6
C. Federal constitutional provision	2	A. Burden, standard of proof	6
D. Other sources.....	2	B. Elements	6
III. Scope of protection	2	C. Waiver or limits to testimony.....	6
A. Generally	2	VII. What constitutes compliance?.....	7
B. Absolute or qualified privilege.....	2	A. Newspaper articles.....	7
C. Type of case	2	B. Broadcast materials	7
D. Information and/or identity of source.....	3	C. Testimony vs. affidavits.....	7
E. Confidential and/or non-confidential information	3	D. Non-compliance remedies	7
F. Published and/or non-published material.....	3	VIII. Appealing	8
G. Reporter's personal observations	3	A. Timing	8
H. Media as a party	3	B. Procedure	8
I. Defamation actions	3	IX. Other issues	9
IV. Who is covered	3	A. Newsroom searches	9
A. Statutory and case law definitions.....	3	B. Separation orders	9
B. Whose privilege is it?	4	C. Third-party subpoenas	9
		D. The source's rights and interests	9

I. Introduction: History & Background

Journalists in Wisconsin have a qualified privilege against testifying in both civil and criminal proceedings. This court-recognized privilege, based on both the state and federal constitutions, applies regardless of whether the journalist obtained the information from a confidential or non-confidential source.

II. Authority for and source of the right

A. Shield law statute

Wisconsin has no shield law statute.

B. State constitutional provision

The Wisconsin Constitution does not include an express shield law provision. State courts have read a qualified reporter's privilege into article I, section 3 of the Wisconsin Constitution: "no laws shall be passed to restrain or abridge the liberty of speech or of the press." *See Zelenka v. State*, 266 N.W.2d 279, 286-87 (Wis. 1978); *State ex rel. Green Bay Newspaper Co. v. Circuit Court*, 335 N.W.2d 367, 372 (Wis. 1983); *Kurzynski v. Spaeth*, 538 N.W.2d 554, 557 (Wis. Ct. App. 1995).

C. Federal constitutional provision

Wisconsin courts also have found a reporter's privilege in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. *See State v. Knops*, 183 N.W.2d 93, 95 (Wis. 1971); *Zelenka*, 266 N.W.2d at 286-87; *Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 559.

D. Other sources

There are no other sources of a reporter's privilege in Wisconsin.

III. Scope of protection

A. Generally

Wisconsin offers a strong qualified privilege for journalists in civil and criminal cases, and the privilege applies to information garnered from both confidential and non-confidential sources.

B. Absolute or qualified privilege

A reporter's privilege in Wisconsin is qualified in all cases. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 559. To determine whether the privilege applies, a court must balance, "on the one hand, the need to insulate journalists from undue intrusion into their news-gathering activities and, on the other hand, litigants' need for every person's evidence." *Id.* The reporter's privilege will apply unless: (1) the party issuing the subpoena has exhausted all alternative sources for the information; (2) the information sought from the journalist is non-cumulative; and (3) the information sought from the journalist is relevant to an important issue in the case. *Id.* at 560. The party seeking the information has the burden of proving these elements by a preponderance of the evidence. *See id.* at 558.

There is no authority in Wisconsin recognizing an absolute privilege for reporters under any circumstances.

C. Type of case

1. Civil

Wisconsin's qualified reporter's privilege operates the same in civil and criminal cases. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 557.

2. Criminal

A reporter's qualified privilege in Wisconsin operates the same in civil and criminal cases. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 557. Furthermore, no court has treated a subpoena differently based on whether the state or the defendant issued it.

3. Grand jury

There is no authority expressly addressing subpoenas to reporters in grand jury proceedings, but Wisconsin courts likely would consider subpoenas issued by grand juries in the same manner as those in civil and other criminal proceedings. *See generally Knops*, 183 N.W.2d 93; *Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d 554.

D. Information and/or identity of source

While no cases have directly addressed the issue, the reporter's privilege in Wisconsin clearly is broad enough to protect the identity of the source, as well as unpublished information gathered by a reporter.

E. Confidential and/or non-confidential information

A reporter's qualified privilege in Wisconsin protects both confidential and non-confidential information. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 559. That is, regardless of whether the reporter obtained the information under a promise of confidentiality, the reporter's privilege against testifying is the same. *Id.*

F. Published and/or non-published material

The privilege does not apply to material that has been published.

G. Reporter's personal observations

A reporter's qualified privilege applies only to information gathered in the course of one's work as a journalist. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 557. While there is no authority directly on point, Wisconsin courts are unlikely to extend the reporter's privilege to information obtained as an eyewitness.

H. Media as a party

The news media was a named party in only one Wisconsin reporter's privilege case. *See Green Bay Newspaper*, 335 N.W.2d 367. The court does not seem to differentiate between situations where the news media is a party and where it is not. *See generally id.*; *Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d 554.

I. Defamation actions

There is no authority in Wisconsin on how the reporter's privilege applies in a defamation or libel case.

IV. Who is covered

Wisconsin courts have done little to define specific terms relevant to the privilege. Courts have determined *whether* the privilege exists and *whether* it applies under certain circumstances, but Wisconsin courts have not examined *who* is entitled to the privilege or *what* information is covered other than the limitation to information gathered in the course of "journalistic endeavors."

A. Statutory and case law definitions

1. Traditional news gatherers

a. Reporter

Reporters are entitled to Wisconsin's qualified reporter's privilege. *See generally Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d 554. There is no authority in Wisconsin that defines "reporter."

b. Editor

There is no authority in Wisconsin that defines "editor."

c. News

Journalists only may invoke the reporter's privilege in an effort to prevent disclosure of information gathered by them in the course of their journalistic endeavors. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 557. There is no authority in Wisconsin that defines "journalistic endeavors."

d. Photo journalist

There is no authority in Wisconsin that defines "photo journalist."

e. News organization / medium

There is no authority in Wisconsin that defines other news organizations or media.

2. Others, including non-traditional news gatherers

There is limited authority in Wisconsin that determines whether the reporter's privilege applies to non-traditional news gatherers such as authors, freelancers, students, unpaid news gatherers, or academic researchers. A Wisconsin circuit court has concluded that an independent filmmaker collecting information for a documentary film may invoke the reporter's privilege. *In re Subpoena to Laura Riccardi, et. al.*, No. 05CF381 (Wis. Cir. Ct. Jan. 18, 2007). The same court implied that student news gatherers may be entitled to Wisconsin's qualified reporter's privilege. *See id.*

B. Whose privilege is it?

The reporter's privilege belongs to the reporter and should apply to the reporter's employer, although Wisconsin courts have not addressed the issue. It does not belong to the source of the reporter's information.

V. Procedures for issuing and contesting subpoenas

There are no special requirements for issuing a subpoena to a member of the news media. Wisconsin's civil subpoena procedures are set out in Wis. Stat. chapter 885.

A. What subpoena server must do

1. Service of subpoena, time

Unless the parties agree otherwise, notice of a third-party subpoena issued for discovery purposes must be provided to all parties at least 10 days before the scheduled deposition in order to preserve the right to object. Wis. Stat. § 805.07 (b). There is no statutory mandate on how far in advance of a proceeding a subpoena must be served.

If the subpoena requests the production of the reporter's books, papers, documents or tangible things that are within the scope of discovery under section 804.01(2)(a), those objects need not be provided before the time and date specified in the subpoena.

2. Deposit of security

A party serving a subpoena in Wisconsin must provide the witness a statutory fee and mileage reimbursement with the subpoena. *See* Wis. Stat. § 885.06. Wisconsin statutes do not require the subpoenaing party to deposit any security in order to procure testimony or materials of the reporter.

3. Filing of affidavit

A party serving a subpoena in Wisconsin need not file an affidavit with the court.

4. Judicial approval

Subpoenas issued by an attorney do not require judicial approval, but they must be approved and signed as mandated by Wis. Stat. § 885.01.

5. Service of police or other administrative subpoenas

There are no special rules in Wisconsin regarding the service of police or other administrative subpoenas.

B. How to Quash

1. Contact other party first

Wisconsin does not require a party to contact or provide notice to the subpoenaing party before moving to quash, but the practice is recommended. Many attorneys are not aware of the reporter's privilege and are willing to voluntarily withdraw a subpoena after they learn of it. Before moving to quash, the reporter's attorney should provide the subpoenaing party a copy of *Kurzynski* and explain the reporter's privilege in Wisconsin.

2. Filing an objection or a notice of intent

Wisconsin statutes do not require a party to file an objection or notice of intent to quash. *See Wis. Stat. § 805.07.*

3. File a motion to quash

a. Which court?

A party should file the motion to quash in the court from which the subpoena was issued. *See Wis. Stat. § 807.02.*

b. Motion to compel

A party filing a motion to quash should not wait for a motion to compel.

c. Timing

A motion to quash must be served no later than five business days before the hearing on the motion. *See Wis. Stat. § 801.15(4).*

d. Language

A motion to quash should set forth the basis for the motion, addressing the privilege test in *Kurzynski*. Specifically, a motion should explain that: (1) the subpoenaing party has not exhausted all alternative sources of the information; (2) the information sought from the journalist is cumulative; or (3) the information sought from the journalist is not irrelevant to an important issue in the case. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560.

e. Additional material

A copy of *Kurzynski* should be attached to the motion to quash for ease of reference.

4. In camera review

a. Necessity

The law does not require the court to conduct an in camera review of materials or to interview the reporter before deciding a motion to quash.

b. Consequences of consent

There is no authority in Wisconsin about the consequences of consent to an in camera review.

c. Consequences of refusing

A reporter who refuses to consent to an in camera review may be held in contempt under chapter 785, as the court may simply refuse to apply the privilege.

5. Briefing schedule

The briefing schedule for a motion to compel or to quash generally is subject to local rules; but in all cases, the motion must be served no later than five business days before any hearing on the motion. *See Wis. Stat. § 801.15(4).*

6. Amicus briefs

Wisconsin courts at all levels routinely accept amicus briefs. Procedural rules for filing an amicus brief in the appellate courts are set forth in Wis. Stat. § 809.19(7). In appeals, nonparties must request permission to file an amicus brief, identify their interest in the case, and state why a brief filed by that person is desirable. The motion

must be filed no later than 14 days after the respondent's brief is filed, and the brief must be filed within the time specified by the court.

VI. Substantive law on contesting subpoenas

A. Burden, standard of proof

To overcome a validly exercised reporter's privilege, the subpoenaing party must show by a preponderance of the evidence "that the requested material is: 1. unavailable despite exhaustion of all reasonable alternative sources; 2. noncumulative; and 3. clearly relevant to an important issue in the case." *Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560, citing *Shoen v. Shoen*, 48 F.3d 412, 416 (9th Cir. 1995).

B. Elements

1. Relevance of material to case at bar

The material or testimony subpoenaed must be clearly relevant to an important issue in the case. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560. Courts require a showing of "actual" relevance as opposed to merely "potential" relevance. *Id.*

2. Material unavailable from other sources

The material or testimony subpoenaed must be unavailable from other sources despite exhaustion of all reasonable alternative sources. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560; *Green Bay Newspaper Co.*, 335 N.W.2d 367, 373. Wisconsin courts closely scrutinize this element. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560-61 (subpoena quashed because party failed to show exhaustion of all reasonable alternative sources).

3. Balancing of interests

The reporter's privilege requires a judicial "balancing between, on the one hand, the need to insulate journalists from undue intrusion into their news-gathering activities and, on the other hand, litigants' need for every person's evidence." *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 559, citing *Shoen*, 48 F.3d at 415-16.

4. Subpoena not overbroad or unduly burdensome

No special procedural rules or defenses apply to the reporter's privilege when determining whether a subpoena is overbroad or unduly burdensome.

5. Threat to human life

There is no authority in Wisconsin that specifically requires courts to weigh whether the information subpoenaed involves a threat to human life.

6. Material is not cumulative

The material or testimony subpoenaed must be noncumulative. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560. The court should quash a subpoena when the information sought from a journalist duplicates that which already is available from other sources to the party seeking the information. *Id.*

7. Civil/criminal rules of procedure

A court may quash or modify by protective order a frivolous or unduly burdensome subpoena. *See Wis. Stat. § 805.07(3)*.

8. Other elements

There is no authority in Wisconsin defining other elements that must be met before the privilege can be overcome.

C. Waiver or limits to testimony

1. Is the privilege waivable at all?

There is no authority in Wisconsin that addresses how, when, and in what way the reporter's privilege can be waived. Generally, however, the holder of a privilege has the power to waive it by words or by conduct expressing an intention to relinquish the right. *See* Wis. Stat. § 905.11.

2. Elements of waiver

a. Disclosure of confidential source's name

There is no authority in Wisconsin addressing whether the reporter's privilege can be waived by the reporter's disclosure of a confidential source's name.

b. Disclosure of non-confidential source's name

There is no authority in Wisconsin addressing whether the reporter's privilege can be waived by the reporter's disclosure of a non-confidential source's name.

c. Partial disclosure of information

There is no authority in Wisconsin addressing whether the reporter's privilege can be waived by a reporter's partial disclosure of information.

d. Other elements

There is no authority in Wisconsin addressing whether the reporter's privilege can be waived.

3. Agreement to partially testify act as waiver?

There is no authority in Wisconsin addressing whether the reporter's privilege can be waived by a reporter's agreement to partially testify.

VII. What constitutes compliance?

There is no authority in Wisconsin addressing what members of the news media must do to comply with a valid subpoena that is not subject to the privilege. Generally, a person must make a good faith effort to comply with any subpoena. *See generally Northeast Corporate Centre v. Bd. of Review of the City of Greendale*, 610 N.W.2d 511 (Wis. Ct. App. 2000).

A. Newspaper articles

Printed materials purporting to be newspapers or periodicals are self-authenticating, and extrinsic evidence of authenticity is not required as a condition precedent to their admissibility. *See* Wis. Stat. § 909.02.

B. Broadcast materials

Broadcast materials are not self-authenticating, and extrinsic evidence of authenticity is required as a condition precedent to the admissibility.

C. Testimony vs. affidavits

There is no authority specifically related to the reporter's privilege addressing whether sworn affidavits can take the place of in-court testimony to confirm that an article was true and accurate as published. Generally, however, Wisconsin courts consider such testimony inadmissible hearsay.

D. Non-compliance remedies

There is no authority in Wisconsin specifically related to the remedies available to force a journalist to comply with a valid subpoena. Generally, however, the court can resort to the laws of contempt to compel compliance with valid subpoenas. *See* Wis. Stat. ch. 785.

1. Civil contempt

No Wisconsin appellate opinions address the issue. The penalties for civil contempt are set forth in Wis. Stat. § 785.04(1).

a. Fines

The court may levy a fine against a reporter held in civil contempt not to exceed \$2,000 for each day the contempt of court continues, not to exceed six months. *See* Wis. Stat. § 785.04(1)(b) and (c).

b. Jail

The court may impose a jail sentence against a reporter held in civil contempt only so long as the contempt continues and, in no event, longer than six months. *See* Wis. Stat. § 785.04(1)(b).

2. Criminal contempt

No Wisconsin appellate opinions address the issue in connection with a subpoena issued to a reporter. The penalties for criminal contempt are defined in Wis. Stat. § 785.04(2). If a district attorney, attorney general, or special prosecutor brings a charge of contempt, a court may impose a fine of not more than \$5,000, imprisonment for not more than one year, or both for each separate charge. A judge, in order to protect the authority and dignity of the court, may on his or her own impose for each separate contempt of court a fine of not more than \$500, imprisonment for not more than 30 days, or both.

3. Other remedies

There are no other remedies to enforce disclosure in Wisconsin.

VIII. Appealing

A. Timing

Generally, if a written notice of judgment or order appealed from is given within 21 days of the judgment or order, an appeal must be initiated within 45 days of the entry of the judgment or order. *See* Wis. Stat. § 808.04(1). If no written notice is given, an appeal must be initiated within 90 days of entry. *Id.*

1. Interlocutory appeals

Although no Wisconsin court has directly addressed the issue as it relates to the reporter's privilege, the denial of a motion to quash is a final judgment as it relates to a non-party reporter and may be appealed as of right. *See* Wis. Stat. § 808.03(1). In Wisconsin, the right to appeal is not restricted to named parties. Instead, any "person" may file a notice of appeal to a final judgment or final order. *See* Wis. Stat. § 809.01; 809.10.

2. Expedited appeals

Either party may seek to expedite an appeal pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 809.17.

B. Procedure

1. To whom is the appeal made?

Generally, an appeal should be initiated by filing a notice of appeal and filing fee with the clerk of the trial court in which the judgment or order appealed from was entered. *See* Wis. Stat. § 809.10. The notice must specify which judgment or order is being appealed, and a copy must be served on the court of appeals, along with a docketing statement. *Id.*

2. Stays pending appeal

A person seeking relief pending appeal must file a motion in the trial court and show why the motion is justified. If it is impractical to seek relief in the trial court, however, a motion to a different court must show, in addition to justification, that it was impractical to seek relief in the trial court. These motions must be filed in accordance with Wis. Stat. § 809.14. *See* Wis. Stat. § 809.12.

3. Nature of appeal

There is no authority in Wisconsin discussing the nature of appeals concerning a motion to quash a subpoena based on the reporter's privilege.

4. Standard of review

A trial court's decision whether to quash a subpoena is discretionary. *See Kurzynski*, 538 N.W.2d at 560. Its "discretionary determination will be upheld on appeal if it is 'consistent with the facts of record and established legal principles.'" *Id.* citing *Lievrouw v. Roth*, 495 N.W.2d 850, 859-60 (Wis. Ct. App. 1990).

5. Addressing mootness questions

No Wisconsin court has addressed the mootness issue when a trial or grand jury session for which a reporter was subpoenaed has concluded.

6. Relief

There is no authority in Wisconsin that addresses this issue.

IX. Other issues

A. Newsroom searches

There is no authority in Wisconsin that addresses this issue.

B. Separation orders

There is no authority in Wisconsin that addresses the issue.

C. Third-party subpoenas

There is no authority in Wisconsin that addresses the issue.

D. The source's rights and interests

There is no authority in Wisconsin that addresses the issue.