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By email

January 19, 2021

Ms. Justine Whelan
U.S. Secret Service
Justine.Whelan@uss.s.dhs.gov

Re: PPE and backpack restrictions at the 2021 inauguration

Dear Ms. Whelan:

The undersigned write regarding tomorrow's inaugural events and protection for the journalists covering these proceedings.

In 2020, [over 300 journalists](#) were injured in the U.S. while covering civil unrest, and multiple journalists were assaulted only two weeks ago while reporting on the January 6 riots. Journalists who cover scenes of potential unrest now routinely are required to carry non-lethal protective equipment such as helmets, ballistic vests, gas masks and other items. As we saw on January 6, such equipment saves lives. We heard through the Reporters Committee's hotline that one photojournalist wore a bulletproof vest that prevented her from getting injured when she was stabbed by one of the members of the mob.

Accordingly, we request that credentialed journalists covering the 2021 inauguration be allowed to carry this life-saving gear, **at least outside the most secured area where the inauguration will occur.** By refusing to permit journalists to carry such protective equipment with them into controlled areas, law enforcement effectively prevents journalists from access to their equipment when moving through checkpoints and controlled areas, thus leaving them more vulnerable outside of the security perimeter, where violence is more likely to occur. **Even if the Secret Service is unwilling to make any concessions on this point, we strongly urge you to clarify exactly what PPE is prohibited, so journalists can proceed accordingly.**

Additionally, we also request that journalists be allowed to carry backpacks larger than 18" x 13" x 7" as this current prohibition prevents members of the media, who often must carry all their equipment with them, from doing their jobs. The security threat posed by backpacks can be eliminated by simply searching and tagging them as has been the case at political conventions in previous years.

At the very least, we request that the Secret Service expedite these directives (regarding PPE and backpacks) for consistency and so that all those manning checkpoints are aware of permitted or prohibited items. Please issue such directives on your letterhead so journalists may print, carry, and display them in situations where authorities may be unaware of such policies.

Thank you so much for your assistance with this urgent matter. Please contact RCFP senior staff attorney Sarah Matthews with any questions at smatthews@rcfp.org.

Sincerely,

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

National Press Photographers Association

The New York Times

The Washington Post