

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
ALEXANDRIA DIVISION

IN RE APPLICATION OF REPORTERS
COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM OF THE
PRESS TO UNSEAL JUDICIAL
RECORDS RELATED TO SEARCH
WARRANT EXECUTED ON JANUARY
14, 2026

Misc. Action No. _____

APPLICATION OF REPORTERS COMMITTEE
FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS TO UNSEAL JUDICIAL RECORDS
RELATED TO SEARCH WARRANT EXECUTED ON JANUARY 14, 2026

1. The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (the “Reporters Committee” or “Applicant”) respectfully moves this Court for an Order unsealing judicial records related to the search warrant executed at the residence of *Washington Post* reporter Hannah Natanson (“Natanson”) on or about January 14, 2026, including the search warrant, application, supporting affidavit, return, and any other judicial records related to the warrant, such as motions to seal and docket sheets (together, the “Search Warrant Materials”). A supporting memorandum of law is filed herewith.

2. As explained more fully in the accompanying memorandum, the press and the public have a right of access to the Search Warrant Materials under the common law, and no compelling government interest justifies the continued sealing of such records.

INTEREST OF THE APPLICANT

3. The Reporters Committee is an unincorporated nonprofit association founded by leading journalists and media lawyers in 1970, when the nation’s press faced an unprecedented wave of government subpoenas forcing reporters to name confidential sources. Today, Reporters Committee attorneys provide *pro bono* representation, amicus curiae support, and other legal

resources to safeguard First Amendment freedoms and the newsgathering rights of journalists.

4. A core component of the Reporters Committee's mission is the protection of journalists' confidential work product and communications against compelled disclosure. The Reporters Committee has therefore played a leading role in shaping federal policy on the use of search warrants and other investigative tools to obtain information from reporters and news organizations. *See New Justice Department Policy Marks 'Historic Shift' in Press Protection*, Reps. Comm. for Freedom of the Press (Oct. 26, 2022), <https://perma.cc/SL7H-HQEV> (describing the Reporters Committee's long-standing role in coordinating dialogue between the U.S. Department of Justice and leading news organizations on the Department's "news media guidelines," which govern obtaining information from, or records of, members of the press).

5. In connection with that mission, the Reporters Committee regularly moves to unseal judicial records in leak investigations to better understand the circumstances in which the government seeks (and courts issue) search warrants and related orders that implicate journalists' sources and work product, including in matters in this District.¹

6. The Reporters Committee relies on information drawn from those materials to publish guidance on reporters' rights and to advocate for stronger safeguards against investigative overreach, including a federal reporters shield law. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Reps. Comm. for

¹ *See, e.g.*, Joint Stipulation of Dismissal, *In re Appl. of Reps. Comm. for Freedom of the Press for Access to Certain Sealed Ct. Recs.*, No. 1:17-mc-00002 (E.D. Va. Mar. 23, 2017), ECF No. 10 (noting the government's unsealing of warrant materials related to the investigation of John C. Kiriakou in response to an application by the Reporters Committee); Order, *In re Appl. of Reps. Comm. for Freedom of the Press for Access to Certain Sealed Ct. Recs.*, No. 18-mc-85 (D. Minn. Nov. 29, 2018), ECF No. 6 (granting the Reporters Committee's application for access to pen register and Stored Communications Act orders related to the investigation of Terry J. Albury); Order, *In re Appl. of Reps. Comm. for Freedom of the Press for Access to Certain Sealed Ct. Recs.*, No. 17-cv-169 (D. Md. June 26, 2017), ECF No. 18 (granting the Reporters Committee's application for access to pen register and Stored Communications Act orders related to the criminal investigation of Thomas Drake).

Freedom of the Press et al. to U.S. Senate (Dec. 7, 2022), <https://www.rcfp.org/briefs-comments/rcfp-senate-press-act-letter/> (writing in support of S. 2457, the Protect Reporters from Excessive State Suppression, or PRESS, Act).

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

7. On January 14, 2026, the Federal Bureau of Investigation executed a search warrant at the Virginia home of *Washington Post* reporter Hannah Natanson. See Perry Stein & Jeremy Roebuck, *FBI Executes Search Warrant at Washington Post Reporter's Home*, Wash. Post (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://wapo.st/4pFh6lw>. According to the *Post*, after searching Natanson's home, agents seized Natanson's personal laptop, a work laptop, a Garmin watch, and her phone. See *id.*; accord Benjamin Mullin et al., *F.B.I. Searches Home of Washington Post Journalist in a Leak Investigation*, N.Y. Times (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://perma.cc/T782-AUQP>.

8. According to the *Post*'s reporting, Natanson was told she was not the focus of the government's investigation; the warrant as provided to Natanson reflects that the seizure was connected to the investigation and prosecution of Aurelio Perez-Lugones, see *id.*, a government contractor who was charged with unlawful retention of national defense information in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland on January 8, 2026, see Criminal Complaint, *United States v. Perez-Lugones*, No. 1:26-mj-00045 (D. Md. Jan. 9, 2026), ECF No. 1; see also 18 U.S.C. § 793(e). The affidavit in support of that complaint alleges that search warrants executed at Perez-Lugones's Laurel, Maryland home and car on January 8 located classified documents in his lunch box and basement. See Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint, *United States v. Perez-Lugones*, No. 1:26-mj-00045 (D. Md. Jan. 9, 2026), ECF No. 1-1. The publicly available filings in the Perez-Lugones prosecution make no reference to Natanson or to the *Washington Post*. See generally *id.*

9. In a statement confirming the search of Natanson's home, Attorney General Pam Bondi announced: "This past week, at the request of the Department of War, the Department of Justice and FBI executed a search warrant at the home of a *Washington Post* journalist who was obtaining and reporting classified and illegally leaked information from a Pentagon contractor. The leaker is currently behind bars. I am proud to work alongside Secretary Hegseth on this effort. The Trump Administration will not tolerate illegal leaks of classified information that, when reported, pose a grave risk to our Nation's national security and the brave men and women who are serving our country." Attorney General Pamela Bondi (@AGPamBondi), X (Jan. 14, 2026, 10:14 AM), <https://perma.cc/N4TK-BPH2>.

10. Because the search and seizure of a journalist's property is a rare and extreme measure, the execution of the warrant has already drawn exceptional public interest. As Bruce D. Brown, president of the Reporters Committee, explained in a statement after the search, "Physical searches of reporters' devices, homes, and belongings are some of the most invasive investigative steps law enforcement can take. There are specific federal laws and policies at the Department of Justice that are meant to limit searches to the most extreme cases because they endanger confidential sources far beyond just one investigation and impair public interest reporting in general. While we won't know the government's arguments about overcoming these very steep hurdles until the affidavit is made public, this is a tremendous escalation in the administration's intrusions into the independence of the press." *RCFP Statement on FBI Search of Washington Post Reporter's Home*, Reps. Comm. for Freedom of the Press (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://perma.cc/EJG8-NNLU>.

11. According to reporting by *Politico*, a Department of Justice official "said the affidavit for the search at Natanson's home remains sealed." Gregory Svirnovskiy, Kyle Cheney

& Josh Gerstein, *FBI agents search home of Washington Post reporter*, Politico (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/01/14/fbi-washington-post-search-00727375>.

12. On information and belief, the Search Warrant Materials are docketed as a sealed miscellaneous matter in this District. *See* Fed. R. Crim. P. 41(b) (venue for search warrant proper where the person or property to be searched is located). The Reporters Committee does not know and cannot ascertain based on public information which of the sealed search warrant matters currently reflected on this District's docket corresponds to the Search Warrant Materials. *See* Search Warrant Running List, E.D. Va., https://ecf.vaed.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/DktRpt.pl?847319082821541-L_1_0-1 (last accessed Jan. 14, 2026).

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

13. The Reporters Committee seeks an order unsealing all judicial records related to the search warrant executed at the residence of *Washington Post* reporter Hannah Natanson on or about January 14, 2026, including the search warrant, application, supporting affidavit, return, and any other judicial records related to the warrant, such as motions to seal and docket sheets.

14. The Reporters Committee seeks any further relief that the Court deems just and proper.

ORAL ARGUMENT REQUESTED

15. The Reporters Committee respectfully requests oral argument on this application.

Dated: January 14, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Lin Weeks

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**Pro Hac Vice Application Forthcoming*

*Counsel for Applicant the Reporters
Committee for Freedom of the Press*

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Lin Weeks, hereby certify that on January 14, 2026, a copy of the foregoing was filed electronically using this Court's CM/ECF system, and sent via U.S. Mail and email to:

United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia
James W. Williams United States Attorney's Building
2100 Jamieson Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22314
usavae.usattys@usdoj.gov

Dated: January 14, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Lin Weeks

Lin Weeks

REPORTERS COMMITTEE FOR
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

*Counsel for Applicant the Reporters
Committee for Freedom of the Press*

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS

(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)

(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)

DEFENDANTS

County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)

NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.

Attorneys (If Known)

II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

- 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)
- 2 U.S. Government Defendant 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)

III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES (Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff and One Box for Defendant)

- PTF DEF
- Citizen of This State 1 1 Incorporated or Principal Place of Business In This State 4 4
- Citizen of Another State 2 2 Incorporated and Principal Place of Business In Another State 5 5
- Citizen or Subject of a Foreign Country 3 3 Foreign Nation 6 6

IV. NATURE OF SUIT (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

Click here for: [Nature of Suit Code Descriptions.](#)

CONTRACT	TORTS	FORFEITURE/PENALTY	BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES
<input type="checkbox"/> 110 Insurance <input type="checkbox"/> 120 Marine <input type="checkbox"/> 130 Miller Act <input type="checkbox"/> 140 Negotiable Instrument <input type="checkbox"/> 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment <input type="checkbox"/> 151 Medicare Act <input type="checkbox"/> 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excludes Veterans) <input type="checkbox"/> 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits <input type="checkbox"/> 160 Stockholders' Suits <input type="checkbox"/> 190 Other Contract <input type="checkbox"/> 195 Contract Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 196 Franchise	PERSONAL INJURY <input type="checkbox"/> 310 Airplane <input type="checkbox"/> 315 Airplane Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 320 Assault, Libel & Slander <input type="checkbox"/> 330 Federal Employers' Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 340 Marine <input type="checkbox"/> 345 Marine Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 350 Motor Vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> 355 Motor Vehicle Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 360 Other Personal Injury <input type="checkbox"/> 362 Personal Injury - Medical Malpractice PERSONAL INJURY <input type="checkbox"/> 365 Personal Injury - Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 367 Health Care/Pharmaceutical Personal Injury Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product Liability PERSONAL PROPERTY <input type="checkbox"/> 370 Other Fraud <input type="checkbox"/> 371 Truth in Lending <input type="checkbox"/> 380 Other Personal Property Damage <input type="checkbox"/> 385 Property Damage Product Liability	<input type="checkbox"/> 625 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881 <input type="checkbox"/> 690 Other LABOR <input type="checkbox"/> 710 Fair Labor Standards Act <input type="checkbox"/> 720 Labor/Management Relations <input type="checkbox"/> 740 Railway Labor Act <input type="checkbox"/> 751 Family and Medical Leave Act <input type="checkbox"/> 790 Other Labor Litigation <input type="checkbox"/> 791 Employee Retirement Income Security Act IMMIGRATION <input type="checkbox"/> 462 Naturalization Application <input type="checkbox"/> 465 Other Immigration Actions	<input type="checkbox"/> 422 Appeal 28 USC 158 <input type="checkbox"/> 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS <input type="checkbox"/> 820 Copyrights <input type="checkbox"/> 830 Patent <input type="checkbox"/> 835 Patent - Abbreviated New Drug Application <input type="checkbox"/> 840 Trademark <input type="checkbox"/> 880 Defend Trade Secrets Act of 2016 SOCIAL SECURITY <input type="checkbox"/> 861 HIA (1395ff) <input type="checkbox"/> 862 Black Lung (923) <input type="checkbox"/> 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) <input type="checkbox"/> 864 SSID Title XVI <input type="checkbox"/> 865 RSI (405(g)) FEDERAL TAX SUITS <input type="checkbox"/> 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant) <input type="checkbox"/> 871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	<input type="checkbox"/> 375 False Claims Act <input type="checkbox"/> 376 Qui Tam (31 USC 3729(a)) <input type="checkbox"/> 400 State Reapportionment <input type="checkbox"/> 410 Antitrust <input type="checkbox"/> 430 Banks and Banking <input type="checkbox"/> 450 Commerce <input type="checkbox"/> 460 Deportation <input type="checkbox"/> 470 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> 480 Consumer Credit (15 USC 1681 or 1692) <input type="checkbox"/> 485 Telephone Consumer Protection Act <input type="checkbox"/> 490 Cable/Sat TV <input type="checkbox"/> 850 Securities/Commodities/Exchange <input type="checkbox"/> 890 Other Statutory Actions <input type="checkbox"/> 891 Agricultural Acts <input type="checkbox"/> 893 Environmental Matters <input type="checkbox"/> 895 Freedom of Information Act <input type="checkbox"/> 896 Arbitration <input type="checkbox"/> 899 Administrative Procedure Act/Review or Appeal of Agency Decision <input type="checkbox"/> 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes
REAL PROPERTY	CIVIL RIGHTS	PRISONER PETITIONS		
<input type="checkbox"/> 210 Land Condemnation <input type="checkbox"/> 220 Foreclosure <input type="checkbox"/> 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment <input type="checkbox"/> 240 Torts to Land <input type="checkbox"/> 245 Tort Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 290 All Other Real Property	<input type="checkbox"/> 440 Other Civil Rights <input type="checkbox"/> 441 Voting <input type="checkbox"/> 442 Employment <input type="checkbox"/> 443 Housing/Accommodations <input type="checkbox"/> 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment <input type="checkbox"/> 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other <input type="checkbox"/> 448 Education	Habeas Corpus: <input type="checkbox"/> 463 Alien Detainee <input type="checkbox"/> 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence <input type="checkbox"/> 530 General <input type="checkbox"/> 535 Death Penalty Other: <input type="checkbox"/> 540 Mandamus & Other <input type="checkbox"/> 550 Civil Rights <input type="checkbox"/> 555 Prison Condition <input type="checkbox"/> 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement		

V. ORIGIN (Place an "X" in One Box Only)

- 1 Original Proceeding 2 Removed from State Court 3 Remanded from Appellate Court 4 Reinstated or Reopened 5 Transferred from Another District (specify) 6 Multidistrict Litigation - Transfer 8 Multidistrict Litigation - Direct File

VI. CAUSE OF ACTION

Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing (Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity):

Brief description of cause:

VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:

CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER RULE 23, F.R.Cv.P. DEMAND \$

CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint:

JURY DEMAND: Yes No

VIII. RELATED CASE(S) IF ANY

(See instructions):

JUDGE DOCKET NUMBER

DATE

SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF RECORD

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

RECEIPT # AMOUNT APPLYING IFP JUDGE MAG. JUDGE