

May 24, 2013

Attorney General Eric Holder
Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Sirs:

More than 50 journalism and press organizations recently wrote you to voice grave concerns about the Justice Department's subpoena of telephone records belonging to Associated Press reporters and editors. We write today as a coalition of civil rights, public interest, transparency and media reform groups to express similar concerns.

Your actions have threatened press freedom — and endangered the health of our democracy. As groups working to strengthen democratic institutions and foster more open government, we are deeply concerned that your agency's actions will hinder efforts to make government more transparent and accountable to the public.

Following years of aggressive leak investigations, the Justice Department's overreaching subpoena of AP phone records sets a dangerous precedent. Furthermore, it appears to violate the Department's own rules and guidelines. The impact of the Justice Department's actions is already being felt. AP CEO Gary Pruitt reports that sources are now less willing to talk to reporters. And journalists from newsrooms large and small have noted the chilling effects on their coverage of the government.

The latest news suggests that the subpoenas were even broader than initially reported. In addition, details are emerging about a case in which the Justice Department also seized phone records from reporters at Fox News and labeled one of its journalists a "co-conspirator" for simply doing his job.

These troubling developments raise real questions about the scope of the Department's surveillance of journalists. At a recent congressional hearing, Mr. Holder, you couldn't recall how many times the Justice Department has subpoenaed journalists' records. We need to know the full extent of your Department's crackdown against journalists.

In the digital age, reporting is no longer confined to America's traditional newsrooms. As such, threats to press freedom threaten anyone who seeks to share information about official actions using a cellphone, social media service or website. The Obama administration promised a new era of openness and transparency. Your actions, which expand secrecy and intimidate those trying to shed more light on our government, run counter to that promise.

We demand a full accounting of the Justice Department's targeting of journalists and whistleblowers. We need this information so that we can advocate for appropriate action to protect everyone's constitutional rights and push for stronger legal standards to protect all types of information gathering and sharing.

The Justice Department must explain its overreach in this matter. Furthermore, we call on the Department to stop violating its existing rules and cease targeting of individuals and organizations reporting on government activity.

Sincerely,

ACCESS

Alliance for Women in Media

American Booksellers Foundation for
Free Expression

American Civil Liberties Union

American Library Association

The Banyan Project

Brave New Films

Center for Democracy and Technology

ColorOfChange.org

Common Cause

Communications Workers of America

CREDO Action

CultureStrike

Defending Dissent Foundation

Digital Media Law Project

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting

Freedom of the Press Foundation

Georgia First Amendment Foundation

IndyMedia

Investigative News Network

iSolon.org

Katy's Exposure Blog

Knowledge Ecology International

LAMP: Learning About Multimedia
Project

Media Alliance

The Media Consortium

Media Mobilizing Project

Mine Safety and Health News

MuckRock

National Alliance for Media Arts and
Culture

National Association of Black Journalists

National Coalition Against Censorship

National Freedom of Information
Coalition

National Priorities Project

Native Public Media

The Newspaper Guild-CWA

OpenTheGovernment.org

Park Center for Independent Media

Participatory Politics Foundation

PEN American Center

Personal Democracy Media

Project Censored

Project On Government Oversight

Prometheus Radio Project

Public Record Media

RootsAction.org

Society of Professional Journalists

Sunlight Foundation

Tully Center for Free Speech at Syracuse
University

United Republic

Utah Foundation for Open Government

Washington Civil Rights Council

Women, Action & the Media

Women In Media & News

Women's Media Center

WRFN, Radio Free Nashville

Writers Guild of America, East