

May 3, 2012

Dear Attorney General Eric Holder:

The First Amendment has come under assault on the streets of America. Since the Occupy Wall Street movement began, police have arrested dozens of journalists and activists simply for attempting to document political protests in public spaces. While individual cases may not fall under the Justice Department's jurisdiction, the undersigned groups see this suppression of speech as a national problem that deserves your full attention.

The alarming number of arrests is an unfortunate and unwarranted byproduct of otherwise positive changes. A new type of activism is taking hold around the world and here in the U.S.: People with smartphones, cameras and Internet connections have been empowered with the means to report on public events. These developments have also created an urgent need for organizations such as ours to defend this new breed of activists and journalists and protect their right to record.

Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of access to information are vital whether you're a credentialed journalist, a protester or just a bystander with a camera. In the digital age, these freedoms mean that we all have the right to create and share information using all manner of devices and lawful means.

In this new environment, we must guard these rights and protect the networks that give so many the means to connect and voice their political beliefs. The First Amendment's protections must extend to everyone.

The right to record is an essential component of our rights at a time when so many of those witnessing public protests carry networked, camera-ready devices such as smartphones. Continuous access to the open Internet and social media — over both wired and wireless networks — is also essential.

We the undersigned call on authorities at the local, state and federal level to stop their assault on people attempting to document protests and other events unfolding in public spaces. We must protect everyone's right to record.

Sincerely,

Access
American Civil Liberties Union
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Free Press
National Press Photographers Association
New America Foundation
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
Reporters Without Borders
Witness