PFDF-NPPA Legal Advocacy Initiative

First Look Media’s Press Freedom Defense Fund Partners with The National Press Photographers Association to Launch The PFDF-NPPA Legal Advocacy Initiative for Journalists

June 4, 2020 – NEW YORK – The Press Freedom Defense Fund (PFDF), a program of First Look Media, and The National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) are partnering to enhance and support the two organizations’ extensive legal advocacy programs for journalists who have been arrested or injured while covering news stories, as exemplified during the nationwide protests over George Floyd’s death while in police custody.

During the last several days, the world has witnessed journalists arrested, assaulted, and injured, often on live television. We rely on journalists to reveal the stories of these events, and such unjustified actions stand in the way of getting vital information out in the public eye.

The multi-faceted initiative will:

• Ensure journalists arrested in these protests have sufficient legal defense through pro bono counsel, or funds to pay for local defense;
• Train journalists about their First Amendment right to record and report as well as ethics, safety and security during events like this;
• Identify partners in law school clinics across the country to provide support in these matters;
• Create a resource list of lawyers to do criminal defense work for journalists in various jurisdictions, including pro bono cases; and
• Engage in strategic litigation to defend journalists’ established First Amendment rights to cover demonstrations, public police activity and civil unrest.
This initiative extends and reinforces The Press Freedom Defense Fund’s core mission to provide legal support to journalists, news organizations and whistleblowers targeted for bringing to light information in the public interest that is necessary for a functioning democracy.

“Donald Trump has spent nearly four years stoking hatred for journalists while also trying to weaken First Amendment protections for the press,” said James Risen, Director of the Press Freedom Defense Fund.

He added, “Our democracy depends on the ability of the press to freely report the truth in order to hold our government accountable. The repeated attacks on journalists at protests across the country threaten the ability of the press to tell the story of the protests and to keep Americans informed. We are proud to support the nation’s journalists at this crucial moment.”

NPPA has been advocating on behalf of journalists for nearly 75 years while stressing its exemplary Code of Ethics. It continues to work with law enforcement agencies across the nation to create a constructive dialogue as well as model policies and training. Unfortunately, the ever-increasing incidents of journalists being arrested and interfered with by police is evidence that more concrete measures are needed.

“Just as journalism is considered to be the first rough draft of history, journalists are on the front line of reporting those events,” said Akili-Casundria Ramsess, NPPA Executive Director. “We are extremely grateful to PFDF for their generous support ensuring that journalists’ First Amendment rights are vigorously protected,” she added.

This is a first step in creating a coalition of press freedom organizations to signal to state, local and federal governments that targeting journalists who cover national protests should not be tolerated. NPPA and PFDF envision other participants will contribute to this important initiative.

For applications and inquiries please email pressfreedom@firstlook.org

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About Press Freedom Defense Fund
First Look Media’s Press Freedom Defense Fund provides essential legal support for journalists, news organizations, and whistleblowers who are targeted by governments, corporations or other powerful figures because they have tried to bring to light information that is in the public interest and necessary for a functioning democracy. The Fund also provides legal resources for operational needs of reporters and news organizations through a pro bono law firm and provides training and education programs to an array of media law professionals, nonprofit organizations, and professional gatherings. The PFDF fearlessly and relentlessly dedicates itself to protecting the First Amendment. Free speech should be regarded as a right, investigative reporting as a duty, and whistleblowing as an act of bravery.

About the National Press Photographers Association
Since its founding in 1946, the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) has been the Voice of Visual Journalists. NPPA is a 501(c)(6) non-profit professional organization dedicated to the advancement of visual journalism, its creation, editing and distribution in all news media. NPPA encourages visual journalists to reflect the highest standards of quality and ethics in their professional performance, in their business practices and in their comportment. NPPA vigorously advocates for and protects the constitutional rights of journalists as well as freedom of the press and speech in all its forms, especially as it relates to visual journalism. Its members include still and television photographers, editors, students, and representatives of businesses serving the visual journalism community. NPPA’s sister organization, the National Press Photographers Foundation (NPPF) supports NPPA’s charitable and educational efforts.

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