

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Metropolitan Police Department



Charles H. Ramsey
Chief of Police

APR - 7 2003

Mr. Robert S. Becker, Esq.
First Amendment/Freedom of Information Chair
Society of Professional Journalists
Washington, DC, Professional Chapter
3315 Morrison Street, NW
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Mr. Becker:

Thank you for your letter of March 6, 2003, concerning the experiences of certain student journalists who were covering protests in the District of Columbia last fall. Because of pending litigation, I am limited in what I can say about that specific event. However, I do want to take this opportunity to restate our Department's policies for working with the news media and our commitment to ensure these relationships are effective and productive.

Let me make it clear that the Metropolitan Police Department respects and supports the rights of all journalists to carry out their work in a lawful, Constitutionally protected manner. Our policies and procedures do not distinguish university student journalists from other members of the news media. MPD members are expected to treat all media representatives in the same professional manner.

After any major event in DC, our Department conducts an examination of lessons learned and opportunities for improvement. One area we continue to examine is the support of news media representatives during protests and other major events. As your letter indicates, there can be unique circumstances affecting student journalists during these types of situations, and we are committed to addressing those situations.

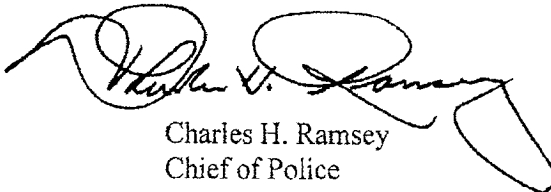
I have assigned Sergeant Joseph Gentile, director of public information for the MPD, to lead our efforts in this area. I understand that Sergeant Gentile and his staff have already begun working on improving the process by which student journalists apply for and receive media credentials from the MPD. I have shared your March 4 letter with Sergeant Gentile, so that he can better understand your other concerns affecting student journalists.

To continue this dialogue, I would encourage you and other appropriate representatives of the student journalist community to contact Sergeant Gentile directly. He would be happy to participate in a sit-down discussion with you of the issues you have raised, if you believe such a meeting would be beneficial. You can reach Sergeant Gentile at (202) 727-4383.

Mr. Robert S. Becket, Esq.
Page 2

Thank you again for your letter and for your organization's work on behalf of student journalists in the District of Columbia. The Metropolitan Police Department applauds the efforts of our student journalists, and we are committed to providing them with the support they need to carry out their important work.

Sincerely,



Charles H. Ramsey
Chief of Police

cc: Honorable Anthony A. Williams, Mayor of the District of Columbia
Honorable Kathy Patterson, Chair, Committee on the Judiciary, District of Columbia Council
Sergeant Joseph Gentile, Director of Public Information