

SPJ and 24 other groups seek meeting with White House to discuss protections against interference in journalists' work

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INDIANAPOLIS — The [Society of Professional Journalists](#) and 24 other journalism groups sent a letter today to the White House to request a discussion about protecting against interference in journalists' work.

The organizations that signed the letter represent thousands of journalists across the country. They request a meeting with the White House Scientific Integrity Task Force to discuss crucial ways to protect against federal interference in journalists' important work.

"Journalists everywhere seek timely and honest answers from government agencies on behalf of the public," said SPJ National President Matthew T. Hall. "But all too often, journalists' jobs are intentionally hindered by government officials in a variety of ways, but most commonly by barring government experts from speaking with reporters or blatantly refusing interviews. The federal government is for the people, and the people deserve to have their questions answered."

"It is imperative that federal agencies be responsive and open to reporters who are seeking the truth in the public's best interest," said SEJ President Sadie Babits. "This is fundamental to our democracy. That's why we, along with dozens of other journalism organizations, ask that federal employees, scientists in many cases, be allowed to speak openly and freely to members of the press."

The barriers to obtaining accurate and authoritative information [are now widespread](#), the letter states, prompting dozens of groups to call for change in [letters](#) to Congress and past presidential administrations.

A comprehensive [analysis](#) by First Amendment attorney Frank LoMonte found that existing controls are unconstitutional. [Seven surveys from 2012 to 2016](#) have shown controls have become common at federal, state and local levels, in health, education, environment and science, and — perhaps most chillingly — in police departments where information has become increasingly important to ensure all members of the public are treated equitably.

The groups say in the letter that they would like to see the task force recommend agencies

- eliminate restrictions on employees speaking to reporters without notification of authorities, especially before but also after the contact;
- credential journalists to enter, without escort, any area of federal facilities where most employees are allowed to enter;
- and make it standard policy that when reporters voluntarily contact public information offices, they are allowed to speak to the people they request.

“These changes would eliminate restrictions and policies that have become pervasive in federal agencies but that are relatively new,” the letter states. “For much of President Joe Biden’s Washington career they were either nonexistent or not nearly as stringent. Sadly, they have now become the norm.”

“Government transparency is so important, and while the average citizen doesn’t have time to keep tabs on every decision agencies make that impacts people’s lives, journalists do,” Hall said. “It’s time we accept that journalists are the watchdogs of government and are asking questions and reporting information on behalf of the American people – as the First Amendment intended.”

SPJ promotes the free flow of information vital to informing citizens; works to inspire and educate the next generation of journalists; and fights to protect First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press. Support excellent journalism and fight for your right to know. [Become a member](#), [give to the Legal Defense Fund](#) or [give to the SPJ Foundation](#).

*The [Society of Environmental Journalists](#) is the only North American membership association of professional journalists dedicated to more and better coverage of environment-related issues. SEJ’s mission is **to strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues.***

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