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National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) Joins in Federal Civil Rights Lawsuit Against NYPD and JP Morgan Chase for Arrests Related to OWS

*Federal lawsuit alleges that civil rights violated and press suppressed by NYPD and private entities including
JP Morgan Chase and Brookfield Properties*

New York, NY. October 22, 2012. The National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) joined 5 elected officials and nearly a dozen members of the press in a major lawsuit filed in federal court alleging the City of New York, the MTA, the New York Police Department, Brookfield Properties, JP Morgan Chase and others are in violation of numerous civil rights, including First Amendment rights to free speech and assembly. The suit seeks redress for police misconduct in arrests made during the “Occupy Wall Street” protests and asks that a federal independent monitor be appointed to oversee the NYPD in order to safeguard the public.

The NPPA joined the lawsuit on behalf of its approximately 7,000 active press photographer members, including Plaintiff Stephanie Keith, on whose behalf NPPA has advocated with the City of New York and agents of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and NYPD. Keith was recently awarded the Newswoman of the Year Award by the Newswoman’s Club of New York. Keith’s photographs have been published by the Associated Press, ABC News, NBC News, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and international news organizations. Keith was arrested twice while covering the Occupy movement.

The NPPA has been a vocal critic of the official response to the “Occupy” protests, particularly of the NYPD’s continued efforts to bar members of the press from being present at police actions. Significantly, the suit alleges that the NYPD actively and purposefully excluded the press and elected officials from observing the eviction of the “Occupiers” from Zuccotti Park last November.

The 180-page amended complaint submitted by a group of civil rights attorneys including Leo Glickman, Yetta G. Kurland and Wylie Stecklow, was filed today in United States District Court in the Southern District and includes nearly 150 additional pages of photographs, letters to the city from the NPPA and a 24-minute video, all highlighting the use of excessive force and selective enforcement which have characterized the response to the “Occupy” movement, which began over a year ago.

The suit also addresses the City’s relationship with JP Morgan Chase, which in 2010 donated \$4.6 million to the NYPD, the largest donation the New York Police Foundation has ever received.

“I joined this lawsuit because as a working journalist I’ve been arrested, thrown to the ground, hit with batons and yelled at by the NYPD while doing my job on assignment” said Ms. Keith. “I have seen my fellow journalists being treated this way as well. Why should journalists be subjected to trauma inducing harassment on the job?”

The President of the NPPA, Sean D. Elliot, said, "By joining in this lawsuit NPPA is hopeful that it can effectively address the continuing course of conduct by the NYPD against its members and others that has chilled our Constitutionally protected rights to gather and disseminate news."

"We are pleased and honored to have the NPPA join our efforts, and we look forward to working with them towards the goals of justice, accountability and freedom of expression," said Sam Cohen, one of the attorneys at the helm of the case. "This is a lawsuit about our First Amendment freedoms, but it is also about accountability. The City of New York spends over \$100 million per year to resolve claims of police misconduct, and denies that police misconduct is a problem requiring reform. We disagree."

"The role and influence of corporate actors in governmental decisions relating to citizens' rights remains unclear," said Leo Glickman, another attorney on the case. "It was our hope in filing this lawsuit on behalf of city officials, journalists, and concerned citizens that we might bring these issues into the light of day, and make progress towards a fairer, more transparent democracy, where the guarantees of the First Amendment are defended not only by the civil rights bar, but by the government itself."

"The NPPA and other members of the press play a vital role in getting the message of OWS out to the world," said Yetta Kurland, "Arresting the press isn't just an attempt by the City and JP Morgan Chase to suppress the press and freedom of speech and expression, but also to suppress the message of Occupy."