



Madison Chapter
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Capitol Police Conduct Will Have a Chilling Effect on Free Speech

Madison National Lawyers Guild Condemns Capitol Police Crackdown

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MADISON, WI – Madison-area members of the National Lawyers Guild call on Governor Scott Walker and the Capitol Police to end their crackdown on peaceful protest in the State Capitol. Such overzealous enforcement of Capitol access policies will have a chilling effect on constitutionally-protected speech.

“The Capitol Police crackdown on peaceful protest is inhibiting free speech in the State Capitol rotunda,” said Attorney and National Lawyers Guild member Patricia Hammel. “Arresting citizens for holding signs in the Capitol Rotunda without getting permission from police, which is not illegal, is just meant to discourage citizens from expressing their opposition to state policies. When someone gets a \$200 ticket and is handcuffed by seven or ten Capitol police and taken away, it sends a message to people around the state that they'd better shut up and stay home; that seems to be the point. There were people who came from around the state to stand in support of the right to free speech, including veterans, who served to defend our civil rights, and an 86 year old Antigo woman who had never visited the State Capitol before. They risked arrest yesterday. Many donated blood at the blood drive. They should be welcomed in our Capitol, the people's house.”

Attorney and Madison National Lawyers Guild member Victor Forberger agreed. “By citing people for doing nothing more than holding up t-shirts that ask folks to give blood or signs that state the free-speech provisions of the Wisconsin Constitution, the Capitol Police are taking extreme action to discourage peaceful protesters from using this constitutionally-protected forum.” Adds Madison Guild Chairman Anthony Prince, “This is not only about the Solidarity Singers; the Capitol lockdown is about gagging the victims of budget cuts, union members, seniors, all those who have right to go to the seat of power to demand that government serve the people and not Walker's corporate pals.”

Members of the Madison National Lawyers Guild have been serving as legal observers, monitoring protests and arrests for unlawful or improper behavior by police. The Chapter is also a partner in the Madison Mass Defense Coalition, which has been helping to coordinate legal representation for individuals who have received citations or been arrested this week.

Although individuals concerned about being arrested are always advised to contact legal counsel, as a general guideline, anyone who does suffer such an arrest should not argue with officers or even converse with them about their protest actions. Instead, protesters should do nothing more than ask officers why they are being arrested, ask what the charges are, immediately demand to speak to an attorney, and, if arraigned, plead not guilty. If possible, the protesters should notify someone who is not being arrested that they are being placed in custody so that this individual can contact the protest coordinator of the Madison National Lawyers Guild, currently at [608-352-0138](tel:608-352-0138). The coordinator will then attempt to find legal representation for the person who has been arrested. Attorneys who are interested in representing protesters should also contact the protest coordinator.

The Madison Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild is the local arm of the national non-profit legal and political organization of lawyers, legal workers, law students, and jailhouse lawyers. The National Lawyers Guild represents progressive political movements, using the law to protect human rights above property interests and to attain social justice.

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