
Journalists Charged for Doing Journalism in Ferguson

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The two reporters were arrested last year after they did not leave the McDonald's where they were working fast enough, after being ordered to leave.

Two journalists from the Washington Post and Huffington Post have been charged with trespassing and interfering with a police officer's performance while reporting on the unrest following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri last year.

Editors from both newspapers have condemned the charges and called them "outrageous."

The Huffington Post's Ryan Reilly and the Washington Post's Wesley Lowery were initially arrested Aug 13, 2014 – just four days after Brown was shot and killed by white police officer Darren Wilson – after police officers entered the McDonald's where they were working.

According to police, the two were detained because they did not leave the fast food chain fast enough, after they were ordered to leave.

However, the two were quickly released and were not charged at the time.

Lowery then received a court summons earlier this month, ordering him to appear in a St. Louis County municipal court on Aug. 24, saying he could be arrested if he does not appear.

According to the summons, Lowery is charged with trespassing on private property and interfering with a police officer's performance of his duties because, the summons alleges, he failed to comply with "repeated commands to immediately exit" the fast food chain.

These counts carry a penalty of up to one year in jail, a fine of US\$1,000 or both.

Reilly has not yet received a summons, but a spokesman for the St. Louis County executive confirmed that he will face the same charges, reported the Huffington Post.

"I maintained from the first day that our detention was illegal and unnecessary," Lowery told the Washington Post from Ferguson, where he is covering the current wave of demonstrations there on the anniversary of Brown's death. "So I was surprised that a year later this is something officials in St. Louis County decided was worth revisiting."

Washington Post executive editor Marty Baron called the arrests an "abuse of authority."

"Charging a reporter with trespassing and interfering with a police officer when he was just doing his job is outrageous," said Baron in a statement released Monday, adding that "This latest action represents contemptible overreaching by prosecutors who seem to have no regard for the role of journalists seeking to cover a major story and following normal practice."

Huffington Post's Washington bureau chief Ryan Grim said in a statement that Reilly has the full support of the newspaper.

"A crime was committed at the McDonald's, not by journalists, but by local police who assaulted both Ryan and Wesley Lowery of The Washington Post during violent arrests," said Grim.
