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TITLE 28 -- JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION
REVISED AS OF JULY 1, 2004
CHAPTER I -- DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
PART 50 -- STATEMENTS OF POLICY

28 CFR 50.10

§ 50.10 Policy with regard to the issuance of subpoenas to members of the news media, subpoenas for telephone toll records of members of the news media, and the interrogation, indictment, or arrest of, members of the news media.

Because freedom of the press can be no broader than the freedom of reporters to investigate and report the news, the prosecutorial power of the government should not be used in such a way that it impairs a reporter's responsibility to cover as broadly as possible controversial public issues. This policy statement is thus intended to provide protection for the news media from forms of compulsory process, whether civil or criminal, which might impair the news gathering function. In balancing the concern that the Department of Justice has for the work of the news media and the Department's obligation to the fair administration of justice, the following guidelines shall be adhered to by all members of the Department in all cases:

(a) In determining whether to request issuance of a subpoena to a member of the news media, or for telephone toll records of any member of the news media, the approach in every case must be to strike the proper balance between the public's interest in the free dissemination of ideas and information and the public's interest in effective law enforcement and the fair administration of justice.

(b) All reasonable attempts should be made to obtain information from alternative sources before considering issuing a subpoena to a member of the news media, and similarly all reasonable alternative investigative steps should be taken before considering issuing a subpoena for telephone toll records of any member of the news media.

(c) Negotiations with the media shall be pursued in all cases in which a subpoena to a member of the news media is contemplated. These negotiations should attempt to accommodate the interests of the trial or grand jury with the interests of the media. Where the nature of the investigation permits, the government should make clear what its needs are in a particular case as well as its willingness to respond to particular problems of the media.

(d) Negotiations with the affected member of the news media shall be pursued in all cases in which a subpoena for the telephone toll records of any member of the news media is contemplated where the responsible Assistant Attorney General determines that such negotiations would not pose a substantial threat to the integrity of the investigation in connection with which the records are sought. Such determination shall be reviewed by the Attorney General when considering a subpoena authorized under paragraph (e) of this section.

(e) No subpoena may be issued to any member of the news media or for the telephone toll records of any member of the news media without the express authorization of the Attorney General: Provided, That, if a member of the news media with whom negotiations are conducted under paragraph (c) of this section expressly agrees to provide the material sought, and if that material has already been published or broadcast, the United States Attorney or the responsible Assistant Attorney General, after having been personally satisfied that the requirements of this section have been met, may authorize issuance of the subpoena and shall thereafter submit to the Office of Public Affairs a report detailing the circumstances surrounding the issuance of the subpoena.

(f) In requesting the Attorney General's authorization for a subpoena to a member of the news media, the following principles will apply:

(1) In criminal cases, there should be reasonable grounds to believe, based on information obtained from nonmedia sources, that a crime has occurred, and that the information sought is essential to a successful investigation--particularly

with reference to directly establishing guilt or innocence. The subpoena should not be used to obtain peripheral, nonessential, or speculative information.

(2) In civil cases there should be reasonable grounds, based on nonmedia sources, to believe that the information sought is essential to the successful completion of the litigation in a case of substantial importance. The subpoena should not be used to obtain peripheral, nonessential, or speculative information.

(3) The government should have unsuccessfully attempted to obtain the information from alternative nonmedia sources.

(4) The use of subpoenas to members of the news media should, except under exigent circumstances, be limited to the verification of published information and to such surrounding circumstances as relate to the accuracy of the published information.

(5) Even subpoena authorization requests for publicly disclosed information should be treated with care to avoid claims of harassment.

(6) Subpoenas should, wherever possible, be directed at material information regarding a limited subject matter, should cover a reasonably limited period of time, and should avoid requiring production of a large volume of unpublished material. They should give reasonable and timely notice of the demand for documents.

(g) In requesting the Attorney General's authorization for a subpoena for the telephone toll records of members of the news media, the following principles will apply:

(1) There should be reasonable ground to believe that a crime has been committed and that the information sought is essential to the successful investigation of that crime. The subpoena should be as narrowly drawn as possible; it should be directed at relevant information regarding a limited subject matter and should cover a reasonably limited time period. In addition, prior to seeking the Attorney General's authorization, the government should have pursued all reasonable alternative investigation steps as required by paragraph (b) of this section.

(2) When there have been negotiations with a member of the news media whose telephone toll records are to be subpoenaed, the member shall be given reasonable and timely notice of the determination of the Attorney General to authorize the subpoena and that the government intends to issue it.

(3) When the telephone toll records of a member of the news media have been subpoenaed without the notice provided for in paragraph (e)(2) of this section, notification of the subpoena shall be given the member of the news media as soon thereafter as it is determined that such notification will no longer pose a clear and substantial threat to the integrity of the investigation. In any event, such notification shall occur within 45 days of any return made pursuant to the subpoena, except that the responsible Assistant Attorney General may authorize delay of notification for no more than an additional 45 days.

(4) Any information obtained as a result of a subpoena issued for telephone toll records shall be closely held so as to prevent disclosure of the information to unauthorized persons or for improper purposes.

(h) No member of the Department shall subject a member of the news media to questioning as to any offense which he is suspected of having committed in the course of, or arising out of, the coverage or investigation of a news story, or while engaged in the performance of his official duties as a member of the news media, without the express authority of the Attorney General: Provided, however, That where exigent circumstances preclude prior approval, the requirements of paragraph (l) of this section shall be observed.

(i) A member of the Department shall secure the express authority of the Attorney General before a warrant for an arrest is sought, and whenever possible before an arrest not requiring a warrant, of a member of the news media for any offense which he is suspected of having committed in the course of, or arising out of, the coverage or investigation of a news story, or while engaged in the performance of his official duties as a member of the news media.

(j) No member of the Department shall present information to a grand jury seeking a bill of indictment, or file an information, against a member of the news media for any offense which he is suspected of having committed in the course of, or arising out of, the coverage or investigation of a news story, or while engaged in the performance of his official duties as a member of the news media, without the express authority of the Attorney General.

(k) In requesting the Attorney General's authorization to question, to arrest or to seek an arrest warrant for, or to present information to a grand jury seeking a bill of indictment or to file an information against, a member of the news

media for an offense which he is suspected of having committed during the course of, or arising out of, the coverage or investigation of a news story, or committed while engaged in the performance of his official duties as a member of the news media, a member of the Department shall state all facts necessary for determination of the issues by the Attorney General. A copy of the request shall be sent to the Director of Public Affairs.

(l) When an arrest or questioning of a member of the news media is necessary before prior authorization of the Attorney General can be obtained, notification of the arrest or questioning, the circumstances demonstrating that an exception to the requirement of prior authorization existed, and a statement containing the information that would have been given in requesting prior authorization, shall be communicated immediately to the Attorney General and to the Director of Public Affairs.

(m) In light of the intent of this section to protect freedom of the press, news gathering functions, and news media sources, this policy statement does not apply to demands for purely commercial or financial information unrelated to the news gathering function.

(n) Failure to obtain the prior approval of the Attorney General may constitute grounds for an administrative reprimand or other appropriate disciplinary action. The principles set forth in this section are not intended to create or recognize any legally enforceable right in any person.

HISTORY: [Order No. 916-80, 45 FR 76436, Nov. 19, 1980]

AUTHORITY: AUTHORITY NOTE APPLICABLE TO ENTIRE PART:

5 U.S.C. 301; 28 U.S.C. 509, 510; 42 U.S.C. 1921 et seq., 1973c; and Public Law 107-273, 116 Stat. 1758, 1824.

NOTES: NOTES APPLICABLE TO ENTIRE CHAPTER:

CROSS REFERENCES: Customs Service, Department of the Treasury: See Customs Duties, 19 CFR chapter I.

Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury: See Internal Revenue Service, 26 CFR chapter I.

Employees' Benefits: See title 20.

Federal Trade Commission: See Commercial Practices, 16 CFR chapter I.

Other regulations issued by the Department of Justice appear in title 4; title 8; title 21; title 45; title 48.

NOTES APPLICABLE TO ENTIRE PART:

[PUBLISHER'S NOTE: For Federal Register citations concerning Part 50, Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection-Procedures, see: 69 FR 10152, Mar. 4, 2004.]