



MAINE PRESS ASSOCIATION

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Scott Ogden
Communications Director
Governor Janet T. Mills

October 28, 2021

Dear Scott,

Thank you for your October 13, 2021 letter regarding concerns about how we, as a society and in general, distinguish journalists who represent neutrally-minded news outlets from those representing advocacy organizations, and any social or political agendas.

The Maine Press Association's Board of Directors agrees with you that the number of advocacy organizations establishing their own press corps has increased, and that the waters of the Fourth Estate have gotten murkier.

Your suggestion that Maine — in particular, the MPA and the Maine Association of Broadcasters — explore establishing our state's own version of the Standing Committee of Correspondents is interesting.

That committee fields applications, and reviews with their own set criteria those journalists hoping to occupy a seat in the Senate and House of Representative Press Galleries. The journalists, "must not be engaged in any lobbying or paid advocacy, advertising, publicity or promotion work for any individual, political party, corporation, organization, or agency of the U.S. government."

The Standing Committee is assisted by the Senate Press Gallery staff, who, "assist correspondents generally and maintain their access to Senate proceedings." Staff members also, "track floor action, tally votes and coordinate coverage of Senate news conferences and hearings. Staff are available to answer questions at the gallery desk and by telephone."

You have invited the MPA to consider this approach, or a similar model, by which journalists would be vetted and credentials provided, should certain standards be met, in order to access state-held news briefings. That idea is unprecedented in Maine (at least in recent memory), and presents novel implications.

The MPA Board of Directors discussed your letter at length during our Oct. 23 annual business meeting, and unanimously agreed it is not in our best interests to establish such a model.

As a trade organization, MPA encourages its members to follow the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, but we do not mandate adherence.

As a financially modest nonprofit, the MPA has not the staff nor the time to assume a project as comprehensive as that of the Standing Committee of Correspondents.

Our capacity is limited; nor do we want to begin judging and credentialing our peers for access to government processes. The MPA Board of Directors, therefore, politely declines any pursuit of establishing a model in Maine that is similar to the Standing Committee of Correspondents.

We hope Maine remains a state in which we, the press corps members, are consistently made welcome at press briefings, despite the businesses and organizations that we represent.

Thank you for your dedication to the principles of open and transparent government. We appreciate your ongoing work for Governor Janet Mills and her administration.

Kind regards,

Lynda Clancy
Immediate Past President
Maine Press Association

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