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Seattle's National Lawyers Guild Condemns Continued Police Violence Towards Legal Observers

Posted on August 17, 2020 by [seattlenlg](#)

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SEATTLE – The Seattle Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild condemns another violent attack on legal observers by the Seattle Police Department (“SPD”). Legal observers, readily identifiable by bright green hats and vests labelled “National Lawyers Guild Legal Observer,” are attorneys, law students, and legal professionals who volunteer to monitor and document police actions against people engaged in political protest.

In the late evening hours of August 16, 2020, in the SODO area of Seattle, SPD attacked dozens of protestors who were demonstrating against police violence. Violating past assurances that the SPD would honor the rights of legal observers with the Seattle Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, SPD officers instead threatened observers with arrest, and repeatedly assaulted them – pushing, grabbing and shoving – even throwing one legal observer to the ground.

Legal observers, like members of the press, are an important bulwark against injustice. As such, they are witness to the culture of violence and racism that is entrenched in the Seattle Police Department. Legal observers’ work requires their physical presence at the scenes of police interactions with protestors without fear of being attacked. It is clear that SPD is targeting legal observers out of fear that their illegal conduct will be exposed to the world. SPD is currently following the approach of police departments in Belarus or Hong Kong which use force to silence anti-government protests.

The Seattle NLG condemns SPD’s continued assaults on our legal observers. The Seattle City Council recently passed Amended Resolution 31961 (co-sponsored by Seattle City Council Members Teresa Mosqueda and Alex Pedersen), which condemns SPD’s intentional targeting of press, legal observers, and medics who are engaging in lawful conduct. We now call on the City Council to pass an ordinance legally protecting these groups. Specifically, we call on the City Council to pass an ordinance that: (1) exempts press, legal observers, and medics from the scope of the so-called “failure to disperse” ordinance, SMC 12A.12.020, and (2) creates a civil remedy for press, legal observers, and medics harmed by SPD.

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