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Media Groups Call on Congress to Protect Journalists

WASHINGTON – The [News Media for Open Government](#) (NMOG) sent letters today to congressional leaders in the U.S. [House of Representatives](#) and U.S. [Senate](#) encouraging action on the Journalist Protection Act in this Congress.

The legislation, S. 751, introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut and Sen. Robert Menendez, D-New Jersey in the Senate, and H.R. 1684 introduced by Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-California in the House of Representatives, would make it a federal crime to intentionally cause bodily injury or threaten a journalist in a manner designed to intimidate him or her from gathering or reporting the news.

NMOG believes that, with the Journalist Protection Act, Congress will send a strong message by affirming the First Amendment protections granted to our nation's journalists and give federal prosecutors the ability to prosecute individuals who assault or intimidate journalists, if state or local prosecutors fail to do so.

“Journalists play an important role in our nation’s democracy,” the letters say. “By gathering and reporting the news, they ensure that our nation’s citizens know what is going on in their communities and how the government is responding to events of the day. Journalists report from the front lines to cover news events, often putting their health and safety at risk, including most recently the public protests in reaction to George Floyd’s killing, as well as the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fact-based, credible news has never been more important as citizens in our country crave information about what is going on around them.”

It is troubling that, during this time of incredible turmoil and crisis, journalists’ First Amendment rights have been disregarded and many have been assaulted and threatened while doing their jobs, the coalition says. The [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#), which has been tracking assaults and threats against the press in recent years, found that during one three-day period at the end of May 2020,

there were roughly 100 attacks or other intimidating actions against the press which has contributed to an overall number of more than 500 for the year.

The coalition urges congressional leaders - Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell, and Minority Leader, Charles Schumer - to stand with journalists gathering and reporting the news and bring H.R. 1684 and S. 751 up for a vote in the 116th Congress.

NMOG members have worked together in a nonpartisan manner for over a decade to speak with a united voice to strengthen open government policies and practices. Members of NMOG include: American Society of News Editors, The Associated Press, Association of Alternative Newsmedia, MPA – Association of Magazine Media, National Association of Broadcasters, National Newspaper Association, News Media Alliance, Online News Association, Radio Television Digital News Association, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Society of Professional Journalists.