

January 24, 2017

San Francisco Mayor Edwin Lee
San Francisco Police Chief William Scott

Dear Mayor Lee and Chief Scott:

Guild Freelancers, a unit of the Pacific Media Workers Guild, protests strongly the arbitrary ejection by a Police Department spokeswoman of 48Hills.org reporter Sana Saleem from a news conference on January 18, 2017.

According to various accounts of the incident, the spokeswoman admitted Ms. Saleem to the news conference venue and, before the event began, ordered her out, using as a pretext the claim that Ms. Saleem does not have a SFPD-issued press credential and 48Hills.org publishes online only. Ms. Saleem has attended many SFPD press events. She has a press pass issued by 48Hills.org. The issues above were never mentioned before. There was no legitimate reason for suddenly questioning her presence.

The SFPD has no right to determine which media outlets it considers legitimate and which it does not. It has no right to discriminate against freelance media workers, many of whom belong to our union. Other organizations besides the SFPD issue press passes, including our union. We demand that they be given the same respect, whether in a press conference or at the scene of events that media workers are trying to cover.

When there are safety concerns, SFPD officers must state what they are clearly, and not use them as a pretext to make media coverage difficult, or to allow some media workers it considers favorable to have access while denying access to others. A photo-ID card from a professional or collegiate news outlet, or from an organization representing freelance journalists provides sufficient information for emergency-response personnel.

Any guidelines issued by the SFPD for relations with media workers must comply with the U.S. Constitution and its guarantees of free press and free speech contained in the First Amendment. We will be watching to ensure that the department follows the law.

We intend to hold you accountable, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

David Bacon,
Guild Freelancers Unit Co-Chair
dbacon@igc.org

Cc:

Tim Redmond, Editor, 48Hills.org
Sana Saleem, Reporter, 48Hills.org
Derek Moore, President, Pacific Media Workers Guild (The NewsGuild-CWA Local 39521)
Rebecca Bowe, President, Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California Chapter

Kate Conger, Co-Chair, SPJ NorCal Freedom of Information Committee
Cherokee Melton, Co-Chair, SPJ NorCal Freedom of Information Committee
Carl Hall, Member, SPJ NorCal Board and Executive Officer, Pacific Media Workers Guild
Richard Knee, Member, SPJ NorCal Freedom of Information Committee and Vice President-
California, Pacific Media Workers Guild
San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón
San Francisco Board of Supervisors