

Jan. 28, 2014

John Cox
Purdue Police Department Police Chief

Dear Chief Cox:

I am filing a formal complaint of harassment, unwarranted detention and violation of my rights by officers while on the Purdue campus.

On Jan. 21, I was stopped just inside the Electrical Engineering Building entrance near the skywalk between EE and MSEE. There were no police barriers or signs telling people not to enter the building.

I don't have a problem with being questioned. I do have a problem with the treatment I received from police. Even though I had Nikon cameras in both hands and identified myself as an Exponent photographer on assignment, police screamed at me to get on the ground. I started to comply, but, apparently, police did not think I was acting quickly enough. One officer had his taser pointed at me even though I posed no threat to them or was I carrying any weapons and was completely compliant. I was already on my knees when police rushed to me and pushed me to the ground as I inevitably used the cameras in my hands to avoid landing straight in my face.

Initially, I thought my camera equipment survived the fall intact, but when I next used my Nikon 70-200mm lens, I learned it was not functioning properly. The top barrel is about to fall off the lens due to damage by being pushed to the floor by police.

I'm also concerned that a Purdue police officer verbally abused me when I was being taken to the Purdue police station. For example, one officer, using profanity-laced language, told me the following: "You're lucky you weren't 'double-tapped' in the chest." When I asked if there would be any possible charges, he replied, "I hope so, and I hope they throw you out of school. And you know where you would be working next year? McDonald."

Though I was detained for more than two hours, no one with the Purdue police asked me a question that indicated they thought I was involved with the shooting in any way. In fact, I was never cuffed or restrained at any point of the duration of my time in the police car or at the headquarter. Thus, someone already determined I was not a threat. Coupled with the derogatory comments directed at me, this indicates to me that I was targeted because I'm a student journalist at The Exponent.

Police also seized my camera equipment and said they needed to check it for evidence. According to attorney Frank Lomonte, the executive director of The Student Press Law Center, this is a possible violation of the federal Protection Privacy Act. Moreover, my camera equipment was not immediately returned to me when I was released by the Purdue Police Department.

I demand this type of behavior toward Exponent student journalists to stop. I don't want the photographers who work for me, Exponent reporters or myself to have to worry about being abused by Purdue police when we're on assignment.

I also want to be reimbursed for repairs expense to my personal camera equipment. I will get an estimate of repairs from Nikon and will forward the estimate to you.

Furthermore, I want an investigation by Purdue authorities as to the appropriateness of staff to assault, harass, and hold against my will. Furthermore, I want an explanation as why the camera equipment was seized and what the police did with that equipment or its raw files while in authorities' possession.

Sincerely,

Michael Takeda,
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