

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement

#### Ranking Member Raja Krishnamoorthi

#### Hearing on “Shielding Sources: Safeguarding the Public’s Right to Know”

#### July 24, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Jordan and Chairman Palmer, for holding this important hearing. I also want to thank Ranking Member Raskin for his leadership on this issue, and our witnesses for testifying today.

A free and flourishing press is a cornerstone of our democracy. Our founding fathers understood the importance of an independent press, which is why they included it in the First Amendment to the Constitution.

A free press informs the public and holds leaders to account. In order for the press to truly be free, however, reporters must be able to protect their sources—whether they are government whistleblowers or corporate insiders.

This crucial ability to protect confidential sources has been eroding over the past several years. As our government has sought to crack down on leaks, more and more reporters have been pressured to reveal their sources. The current Administration is no exception to that trend. In fact, last August, Attorney General Sessions announced that the Department of Justice had tripled the number of active leak investigations, saying, and I quote, “this culture of leaking must stop.”

There is no question that classified or other legally-protected information must be properly handled. But our government should not prosecute the journalists who expose corporate and government wrongdoing with the information that whistleblowers bring them.

Although almost all states have shield laws, they vary in scope and do not apply in federal cases, where courts have issued conflicting rulings. That is why a federal shield bill is so important. Vice President Pence sponsored such a bill in 2007, which passed the House with broad bipartisan support. I am glad that Representatives Raskin and Jordan have introduced a shield bill this Congress, and I hope it will be given full consideration.

We have a lot of work to do. In the World Press Freedom Index, the United States’ ranking fell to 45<sup>th</sup> in the world.

According to Reporters Without Borders, which compiles the Index, President Trump has “fostered further decline in journalists’ right to report.” He has called the press, “the enemy of the American people” and labelled unfavorable coverage “fake news.” He has also called for revoking broadcasting licenses of certain mainstream new outlets.

President Trump has expressed hostility to a free press, but undermining legitimate journalism is dangerous. It makes us less informed and erodes our trust in government. It wears away the fabric of our society.

That is why I am glad we are holding this hearing. We must work together to strengthen our commitment to a robust, free press.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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