



# Ohio Public Records Law Update

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# What is an Auditor?

- An “auditor” is not a specific position, title, or job.
- Individuals who self-identify as Auditors do not have any additional powers from the general public.
- Their purpose is to test the limits of various constitutional rights or laws for monetary gain, notoriety, or both.





# Different Types of Auditors

**Auditors can come in a variety of forms, the most common include:**

- First Amendment Auditors
- Public Records Auditors
- Open Meetings Act Auditors
- Second Amendment Auditors

# What is a First Amendment Auditor?

- Activists or citizen journalists targeting a government facility, employee or event
- Likely demanding answers and attempting to explore a building or crime scene
- Encounters are recorded



- Purpose is a test of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment
- Encounter is broadcast to the public via social media + YouTube
- Primary goal is to provoke a reaction, even a lawsuit



# Legal Background

- What is protected by the First Amendment?
  - Visual
  - Audio



# First Amendment Auditors— Do They Have the Right?





# Legal Rights

- Forum – Where can this happen?
  - Traditional
    - e.g. park
- Designated
  - e.g. meeting facilities
- Limited
  - e.g. Open space for limited uses/topics
- Non-public
  - e.g. spaces not open to the public





# Legal Rights

- Restrictions?
  - Time
  - Place
  - Manner
  - Viewpoint neutral
  - Reasonable





# What are First Amendment Auditors Recording?

- Public buildings
- Parking lots
- Individuals on a public sidewalks
- Parks
- Public Vehicles (including confirming locked while parked)
- Personal Vehicles



# Librarian Loses It





# On Scene with Law Enforcement

First Amendment  
Auditor tells  
officer, “You are  
dismissed.”





# Can Someone Lawfully Video in a Public Space?

- Generally, if in a public space, an individual has the ability to photograph/video anything in plain view.
- What about audio?
- Ohio is a one-party state, but...consent is not required where speaker does not have an ordinary expectation of privacy.



# Can Someone Lawfully Video in a Public Space?



# Legal Considerations

- Freedom of the press includes the right to record video and audio.

- *Am. Civil Liberties Union of IL v. Alvarez*, No. 11-1286 (7th Cir. 2012).

The act of *making* an audio or audiovisual recording is necessarily included within the First Amendment's guarantee of speech and press rights.

- *Lovell v. City of Griffin*, 303 U.S. 444 (1938).

The press comprehends every sort of publication which affords a vehicle of information and opinion.



# Legal Considerations

- *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S. 665 (1972).
  - The First Amendment does not provide the press a right of special access to information not otherwise available to the public, generally.
- *Glik v. Cunniffe*, No. 10-1764 (1st Cir. 2011).
  - Recording police and other government officials in the discharge of their duties is explicitly allowed.

# How to Respond?

## How to Prepare

- Know how to recognize auditors
- Ensure public areas of building are clearly marked
- Educate your employees
- Establish guidelines
- Ensure police personnel are prepared for out-of-building encounters

- Consult with your attorney
- Know the law and their rights
- When in doubt...contact law enforcement

Gov communicator taking the bait and getting frustrated



First Amendment Auditor posting your reaction to YouTube





# How to Respond?

## How to Respond

- Don't overreact- acknowledge their right to record
- Be prepared to be provoked
  - Repeated questions
  - Not satisfied with answers
  - Profanity
- Know when you need help from a co-worker/supervisor
- Keep it short – continue business as usual
- Boring is good
- Understand anything that you do may end up on YouTube or in a 1st Amendment Lawsuit

