



Illinois News Broadcasters Association

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(SPRINGFIELD)--The Illinois News Broadcasters Association wrote Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez Monday that it "strongly protests" efforts by Alvarez to force Northwestern University's Innocence Project to give up notes, off-the-record interviews, grades and even e-mails related to the project.

"The students are working as investigative journalists," said INBA President Melissa Hahn, who said they clearly should be covered under the Illinois Reporter's Privilege Act, which offers a broad definition of reporters, news mediums and sources.

"Journalism is too important to our society to be invaded and inspected by law enforcement and prosecutors," she wrote in the letter to Alvarez. "So the act should apply to these students."

Alvarez considers the students nothing more than private investigators, and questions the motivations for their work in the case of Anthony McKinney, whose conviction for killing a security guard in 1978 has come under judicial review because of the Innocence Project's work.

"When it comes to searching for the truth, which is the premise of journalism, issuing subpoenas for the background work of journalism is a step in the wrong direction," Hahn wrote.

INBA also takes issue with the insinuation by Alvarez that the students bribed a witness.

"That money was paid to a cab driver who transported a witness, and that money should in no way be considered a bribe," Hahn said.

(more)



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It is INBA's position that the investigative reporting done by the Innocence Project has saved lives, and that the work of the students and their instructors has been in the highest traditions of the profession. The Innocence Project has exposed wrongful conviction and imprisonment, including cases in which the wrong person was sent to Illinois' death row. Its findings helped prompt then-Gov. George Ryan to empty death row in 2003.

"Society benefits from a robust fourth estate which is free from law enforcement and prosecutorial interference," Hahn wrote in her letter to Alvarez. "If law enforcement and the legal system are allowed to confiscate journalists' notes and other materials, journalism will suffer, as will society as it is denied access to information."

INBA is a statewide organization of professional journalists, journalism students and journalism educators, founded in 1955. It has worked diligently to support the First Amendment and the rights of all journalists, both professionals and students.

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