

March 10, 2006

Testimony of
PAUL LEWIS
Before the
Judiciary Committee
in support of

H.B. 5212, AN ACT CONCERNING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee this afternoon. My name is Paul Lewis. I am the News Director at WTIC-TV/FOX 61 and WTXN-TV/WB20 in Hartford. Those stations are owned by Tribune Company.

I am here to speak in support of H.B. 5212, AN ACT CONCERNING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

I have been a journalist for 28 years, much of that time as an investigative reporter and producer at local television stations and for national newsmagazines. For the past 10 years I have been in charge of a news operation here in Connecticut. So, I think I have a full understanding of the issues surrounding confidential sources from the reporter's and management's view.

As you know, because our reporters are up here pursuing stories with you every day, the news business is often fractious and cantankerous and extremely competitive. It's rare when all four News Directors from the state's news organizations will agree on something. Our unanimity will tell you a little about how important this issue is to us all.

It's crucial not for us, per se, but for the citizens of Connecticut. It sounds corny, perhaps, but we really do see our roles as journalists as serving the people, just as you are servants of the people in your capacity as members of the Legislature.

The bottom line is sometimes a reporter must use a confidential source in order to get an important story to the people. Frankly, I don't much like confidential sources and we try very hard in my newsroom to not use them. Sometimes, however, it is necessary because there simply is no other alternative.

We struggle with granting confidentiality, frankly, because it should not be granted lightly. We are suspicious of hidden agendas. We ask ourselves: Is the source legitimately fearful of losing his job or are we being used for political gains?

If we conclude the information is real, the motive is not problematic, and the story is so important, we will use that source with the promise of not revealing his or her name. History offers several examples of reporting with confidential sources that changed this country for the better because wrong-doing was exposed and corruption was brought to light. Watergate, Enron, AbuGhraib. The list goes on.

Recent cases of reporters being jailed for using confidential sources—and in the case of Judith Miller, without even writing a story—are deeply troubling. Again, it's not that we, as reporters, deserve special status; it's because what we do is crucial for an open democracy. Ours is the only profession talked about in the constitution. It really is a sacred calling.

Frankly, we need your help to safeguard the free flow of information to the citizens of Connecticut. This bill will make it more likely people with important information about government and corporate corruption will come forward to right those wrongs.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this bill. I would be happy to discuss it further with anyone as this works through the legislative process.