



NEWS RELEASE

Niagara Region's violation of press freedom is inexcusable: CAJ

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OTTAWA, Dec. 8, 2017 /CNW/ - Ontario's Niagara Region became the most recent municipal government to **violate a journalist's freedom** to report the news at city council.

Municipality officials confiscated a reporter's notes and equipment during an in-camera session of council, and even called the police, after accusations surfaced that the reporter may have recorded an in-camera session. The municipality later returned the materials and **apologized** for the wildly inappropriate seizure.

Bill Sawchuk, a longtime reporter in St. Catharines, Ont., left his laptop and notes in the council chamber when the room was cleared for the in-camera session. He **was not** secretly recording the proceedings that followed, but officials acted swiftly on the accusation—and forced him to leave the premises, apparently on threat of police action, when he attempted to return to the chamber to continue reporting.

"No government should act first and ask questions later when it comes to press freedom," said CAJ President Nick Taylor-Vaisey. "There was no evidence that Mr. Sawchuk was violating any rules or procedure, and yet he was bullied into leaving the building.

"Anyone who was concerned about a lingering laptop could have simply paused the meeting and asked Mr. Sawchuk to remove it. Instead, they attacked press freedom."

The CAJ applauds Sawchuk, who later tweeted that he continued his reporting to the best of his ability—and in his

readers' best interests. "I eventually filed my stories—and kept our readers informed," he wrote. In the end, that's what it is all about."

The CAJ calls on Niagara Region officials, who have committed to review their existing policy and protocol, to admit wrongdoing and pledge never to repeat such a damaging course of action.

The CAJ is Canada's largest national professional organization for journalists from all media, representing about 600 members across the country. The CAJ's primary roles are to provide public-interest advocacy and high-quality professional development for its members.

SOURCE Canadian Association of Journalists