

# Citizens and the Fourth Estate

The Preamble of the Constitution starts with the words, "We the People." Under the Constitution, the power to govern comes directly from the people via free and open elections of government officials by the citizens of our country. While it is true that the right to vote was hard fought by many, including African Americans and women, the Constitution established the foundation for the arguments to ultimately extend voting rights to all qualified citizens.



Also guaranteed in the Constitution are the freedoms under the First Amendment including the freedom of the press. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, in his concurring opinion in the landmark case about the publishing of the Pentagon Papers - *New York Times Co. v United States* (1971), wrote, "In the First Amendment the Founding Fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors. The Government's power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the Government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of government and inform the people. Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government."

While, the First Amendment protects the right to protest, dissent, and petition the government for a redress of grievances, these rights cannot be exercised without the information a free press provides to the public. In order for citizens to thoughtfully participate in governing, they must be know what their government leaders are doing. American citizens and a free press together act as government watchdogs to ensure our elected officials and government agents act in our best interest. Together they are the fourth branch of our democracy, frequently referred to as the Fourth Estate.

**Look for news reports, in-print or online, that inform the public of government actions at the local, state or federal level. Imagine our world without a free press. What would we know about our government without the media?**

For more resources based on this year's Law Day theme go to <https://tinyurl.com/LawDayED3-12>



*This is one of seven Newspaper In Education features created to educate and celebrate Law Day 2018. Developed by the NYNPA NIE Program based on resources provided by the American Bar Association.*