



National Lawyers Guild
SEATTLE CHAPTER



December 11, 2014

Dear Mayor Murray and Seattle City Councilmembers:

We are saddened that the Downtown Seattle Association (“DSA”) and its partners in the business community do not understand the First Amendment and the right to protest in the most public of places in Seattle – downtown. DSA’s recent letter (12/10/14) exhibits a fundamental misunderstanding about a primary function of Seattle’s public spaces – streets, plazas and sidewalks – which have traditionally been places for free expression of public opinion without harassment. Westlake, in particular, has a core role as a forum for public protest because it was developed through the use of the Seattle’s condemnation power and was explicitly designed to be a public forum.

DSA’s narrow focus on increasing private profit does not reflect the broader downtown community, where many of our members have their own offices and businesses. In contrast to DSA, we welcome the growing protest movement against police violence and believe that such protests are an important part of a free and democratic society. We do not think that our police should model their behavior on that of foreign security forces, such as those in Hong Kong, who recently used similar repressive tactics to clear the streets of pro-democracy protestors there.

In contrast to DSA’s request to limit free speech even further in favor of corporate profits, we urge you to investigate in a public fashion the emerging pattern of police misconduct directed toward non-violent protestors. In a coordinated fashion, our police force has been regularly intimidating non-violent protestors, showing up to every protest with dozens of heavily armed officers who follow, box in, spy on, and harass people who criticize police violence. In a blatant exercise of content-based discrimination, officers have illegally, without authority of law and without civilian oversight, blocked public access routes to downtown, including sidewalks, to people exercising their First Amendment rights, while explicitly giving preference to shoppers. Officers have also used chemical weapons and concussion grenades on protestors to enforce their orders to suppress speech in downtown, and have selected protest organizers to arrest (recently arresting one organizer and then admitting they had made a “mistake”).

The cost of this police harassment is staggering, as SPD has wasted nearly a half a million dollars by its conduct toward protestors. This is money that clearly should have been used for social services in Seattle and for increasing the minimum wage of Seattle workers immediately to \$15 an hour.

Please reject DSA's narrow-minded proposals and, instead, investigate SPD's misconduct.

Sincerely,

The Seattle Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild

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