

Legal Observer Workshop

1. [5min] Intro: who we are. Has anyone done any LO-ing before?
2. [5min] What's the purpose of watching and recording what the cops do?
 - Cops on the defensive if they're being watched = keep people safe
 - Gather and organize information for criminal defense
 - Gather and organize information for suing cops
3. [7min] Rights of Observers / Interacting with Cops
 - Journalists have some right to record a natural disaster or a "riot". Legal Observers do not.
 - Vignette:
 - a) Cop bullies Legal Observer, ordering her to leave the scene. Observer is self-righteous and stubborn, cites 1st Amendment right to be there. Constantly clicks pictures from close-up. Cop grabs camera. Observer threatens to file a complaint. Cop arrests observer: "You can't arrest me, I'm a legal observer!" "So take notes."
 - b) Cop bullies legal observer, orders her to leave the scene. Observer is calm but firm, backs up but doesn't leave scene. Observer takes photos throughout.
4. [5min] What to Look For?
 - Badge #s and names of cops so misconduct can be traced
 - Anything significant the cops do – violence, obviously, but also menacing behavior (e.g. Putting on gas masks, bringing in urban tanks, circling protesters)
 - Don't make assumptions or judgements – just record what happens
 - Get names and contact info for victims and witnesses, including other legal observers and media
 - Look at the Legal Observer Guide for examples of what to look for
5. [5min] Gear (Brainstorm):
 - Notebook(s)
 - Pens (waterproof ink – it could rain water or pepper spray)
 - Watch
 - Hat / armband / T-shirt
 - Extra Water!
 - Optional:
 - Tape recorder (& extra tapes)
 - Still camera (& extra film)
 - Video camera (& extra film)
6. [1min] Bad, Bad Cops
 - Sometimes videotaping, etc. keeps you safer, sometimes it makes you a target
 - The more equipment you have, the more of a target you become
 - There was an intercepted police communication in Seattle telling officers at a location to seize all the legal observer notes
7. [5min] Tips

- watch the cops, not the protesters.
- stay at arms reach
- if you have a camera / video camera, great, if not, take notes on whatever you can.
- write up a brief statement afterwards, while it's fresh in your mind. Be specific about people, locations, directions, actions, etc. (give example). If you aren't sure, be more specific than you think. This is stuff you will forget soon afterwards.
- let the legal team (or the organizers, if no LT) know that you were a witness and what documentation you have (written statement, video, pics, etc.)
- with video: shoot street signs/landmarks. Keep date/timestamp on &/or dictate date and time.

8. [20min] Close with a few vignettes and people practice observing (take notes). Discuss

Scenario 1

Cop: "You have 3 minutes to disperse or youwill be arrested!"

Protester: "I'm trying to leave but all the exits are blocked by police. Will you let me leave?"

Cop: "No can do. Orders. Sorry." Shouts, "This is your third and final warning! You must disperse immediately!!" (Cop then arrests the protestor)

- Look for:
 - * Descriptions, etc.
 - * Badge # and name of cop
 - * What was said (especially "orders"!)
 - Lesson:
 - * This is super typical of what happens during protests and picket lines.
 - * You can get this person acquitted of Failure to Disperse charges and sue the cops.

Scenario 2

Protestor: "What's your badge number? I have a legal right to know what your badge number is!"

Cop: (Stony silence.)

Protestor: "Fuck you, pig!"

Protestor then walks away. The cop shoves the protestor, the protestor falls to the ground, and then the cop says, "You're under arrest for assaulting an officer."

- Look for:
 - What led up to the incident?
 - What hand(s) did the cop use to push the protestor?
 - What did the cop say (badge info, assault)?
- Lesson:
 - This is also pretty typical.
 - You can help get this person's charge dropped at the least.

Evaluation