

Media backs Patriot Ledger's push to unseal O'Connell case

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The Patriot Ledger

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QUINCY — On the same day William O'Connell was indicted, a coalition of media and free press organizations formally requested permission to file a brief in the state supreme court supporting The Patriot Ledger's efforts to unseal records in the case.

The Motion for Leave to File a Brief Amici Curia was filed in the Supreme Judicial Court by the Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association, the New England Newspaper and Press Association, the Citizen Media Law Project and the New England First Amendment Coalition.

The organizations argue against the appeal, filed by a prosecutor and O'Connell's attorney, of Quincy District Court Judge Robert Ziemian's order to lift an impoundment placed on search warrant records that are tied to the March 31 police raid of O'Connell's Marina Bay condominium.

"The appeal before this Court presents a serious threat to the freedom of the press and the public's right to judicial records," the brief reads.

Earlier this month, in response to a Patriot Ledger motion to remove the impoundment, Ziemian ruled that there was not good cause to keep the records sealed and that a law that restricts the public availability of police records in sexual assault cases does not apply to the materials in question in O'Connell's case.

Prosecution and defense argued that the records need to be impounded because they threaten to identify the victim and threaten O'Connell's right to a fair trial.

Though Ziemian ordered the impoundment lifted, the documents in question will likely not become public until the case is resolved in the state Supreme Judicial Court.

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