



## Citizen Media Law Project Launches Online Legal Guide

**News Release: February 5, 2008**

Cambridge, MA – The Citizen Media Law Project (CMLP) launched the first sections of its Citizen Media Legal Guide (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide>) last week. The guide, intended for use by citizen media creators with or without formal legal training, addresses the legal issues that traditional and non-traditional journalists are likely to encounter as they gather information and publish their work online.

“There is a tremendous need for a comprehensive – yet approachable – guide to the legal issues faced by online publishers. As more journalists, whether professional or non-professional, begin to practice their craft online we hope that they can turn to this guide to help them understand the legal environment they are operating in,” said David Ardia, director and co-founder of the CMLP, an initiative to provide practical knowledge and tools for citizen media and to study the impact of law on online journalism.

The sections of the legal guide released so far include “Forming a Business and Getting Online,” which covers forming a for-profit or nonprofit business entity, choosing an online platform, and dealing with critical legal issues relating to the mechanics of online publishing, and “Dealing with Online Legal Risks,” which covers the legal issues involved in operating a blog or website, finding insurance, finding legal help, and responding to the different kinds of legal threats publishers may face as a result of their online activities.

The legal guide follows the successful launch in November of the CMLP’s Legal Threats Database, an interactive compendium of legal threats directed at online speech. The database contains lawsuits, subpoenas, and other types of legal threats from 37 states and 11 countries. These threats range from copyright infringement lawsuits filed against bloggers to cease and desist letters claiming defamation sent to MySpace users. Visitors to the CMLP’s website can input new threat entries, comment on existing threats, and search the database in a number of ways, including by location, legal claim, publication medium, and content type.

“We are especially excited about integrating the information in our legal guide with the legal threats database we created. Visitors to the site can read about actual cases addressing the issues they are learning about in the legal guide. We’ve collected court decisions, legal briefs, and other relevant documents to bring these cases to life and help visitors understand how judges and lawyers actually apply the law,” David Ardia commented.

The legal guide is funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. It will initially cover the 15 most populous U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Once complete, it will focus on

the wide range of legal issues online publishers face, including risks associated with publication, such as defamation and privacy law; newsgathering; access to government information; intellectual property; and corporate/nonprofit formation and governance. The CMLP will continue to roll out new sections of the legal guide through the spring.

### **About the Citizen Media Law Project**

The Citizen Media Law Project, which is jointly affiliated with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School and the Center for Citizen Media, has five primary objectives: legal education and training; collection and analysis of legal threats; litigation referral, consultation, and representation; community building; and advocacy on behalf of citizen media. It was the recipient of a 2007 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation News Challenge grant. For more information, visit <http://www.citmedialaw.org>.

### **About the Berkman Center for Internet & Society**

The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School is proud to celebrate its tenth year as a research program founded to explore cyberspace, share in its study, and help pioneer its development. Founded in 1997, through a generous gift from Jack N. and Lillian R. Berkman, the Center is now home to an ever-growing community of faculty, fellows, staff, and affiliates working on projects that span the broad range of intersections between cyberspace, technology, and society. More information can be found at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu>.

### **About the Center for Citizen Media**

The Center for Citizen Media, which is co-sponsored by Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication and the Berkman Center, aims to understand, enhance, and expand grassroots journalism and its reach. Since its 2005 launch, the CCM has initiated a number of projects including a survey of how traditional media organizations are bringing their audiences into the journalism process and a directory of citizen media projects and tools. More information can be found at <http://www.citmedia.org>.

### **About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes journalism excellence worldwide and invests in the vitality of the U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Since 1950 the foundation has granted more than \$300 million to advance journalism quality and freedom of expression. Knight Foundation supports ideas and projects that create transformational change. For more information, visit <http://www.knightfdn.org>.

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