

Photographer held for hours by Police

Written by Joe Torres



White Plains, Westchester. March 21, 2006. A local photographer is looking for an apology after he was held for hours by police. He was taken into custody for questioning because of what he decided to snap a couple of shots of.

Eyewitness News reporter Joe Torres is live in White Plains with the story.

As a freelance photographer, Ben Hider carries his camera with him just about everywhere, and so it was on Friday, as he was heading to the train station in White Plains he stopped to snap some beauty shots on the flags in front of the court house. That's when his trouble began.

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Ben Hider, Photographer: "Three police officers ran at me, immediately, telling me to stop where I was."

And that's exactly what Ben Hider did. He even showed the court officers the pictures he took and offered to delete them. Moments later they escorted him inside the courthouse for two hours of questioning.

Ben Hider, Photographer: "Emptied my pockets, searched me, frisked me, started telling me about the recent terrorist threats in America over the past five years and 'haven't I been watching the news?'"

The 27-year-old is a graduate of SUNY Purchase. He's lived in the states for eight years and he has a green card, but he says his British citizenship only raised the officers' suspicion.

A spokesman for the office of court administration admits the officers were out of line.

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David Bookstaver, Office of Court Administration: "Yes, they went too far. Picture taking in itself is not suspicious behavior, detaining someone for two hours for taking pictures was wrong and we've apologized to Mr. Hider for what happened."

The New York State Supreme Court Officers Association strongly disagrees with that assessment and instead blames the office of court administration.

John McKillop, the union president, told us: "There is no policy anywhere in the unified court system, in New York City or Westchester, dealing with this and officers are left to fend for themselves."

Caught in the middle is Ben Hider, who received a formal apology from the state's first deputy administrative judge. Now he'd like an admission of wrongdoing from the officers themselves.

Ben Hider, Photographer: "I spent two hours in a police cell doing nothing, feeling threatened by them, and for them to get away with that is ridiculous."

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The court officers union president explained to us that in a previous and similar situation, the court officers were berated by an administrative judge for not detaining an individual.

That's why they want a policy explanation and that's why today a memo was issued offering very clear specifics on what to do with people taking pictures in public places.

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<http://zonezero.com/magazine/articles/joetorres/index.html>

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