

Requirements And Procedures For Issuing Supreme Court Press Credentials

Introduction

The Supreme Court's Public Information Office (PIO) provides the general public and professional journalists with information about the Court and its work. Among its many responsibilities, the PIO administers the Court's press credentialing process, which includes issuing hard passes (full-time credentials) and day passes. Although a hard pass may not be essential for reporting on the Court, it confers privileges that journalists find helpful, including access to seats in the Courtroom during Court sessions; use of the pressroom facilities and office resources; assigned personal work space; and access to the Court building after normal business hours. In addition, the PIO provides credentialed reporters with information and guidance, beyond what is provided to the public, that facilitates their work. Twenty-six journalists currently hold hard passes. The PIO also issues more than 1000 day passes every Court Term, providing single-day access to the Courtroom and pressroom to individuals seeking to observe a particular Court session.

The PIO's seven-member staff must carefully allocate the limited space and resources available for press usage. The Courtroom has a limited number of seats set aside exclusively for the media, and the press room has 18 carrels for the media's use. To ensure efficient allocation of space and resources, the PIO has traditionally reserved hard passes for full-time professional journalists employed by media organizations that have records of substantial and original news coverage of the Court and a demonstrated need for regular access to the Court's press facilities. The PIO makes no assessment of the content or quality of a journalist's coverage in the credentialing process. But because the Court's fundamental function is adjudication of important issues, the PIO must ensure that press credentialing does not create any appearance of partiality or unfair advantage among litigants or attorneys engaged in the Court's judicial processes. And because a press credential provides access to non-public spaces, the PIO must also be attentive to security concerns.

To better meet those demands and the needs of journalists, to provide greater transparency about the credentialing process, and to address changes in the journalism profession, the PIO adopted new requirements and procedures for issuing Supreme Court hard passes and day passes in February 2015. Commentary is included to explain the rationale for the requirements and procedures and to guide their interpretation. All current holders of hard passes are required to submit applications to renew their credentials for the next term by August 1.

Requirements for Issuing Supreme Court Press Credentials.

Hard Passes. To qualify for a hard pass, an applicant must demonstrate:

The applicant is a full-time journalist;

The applicant operates or is employed by a media organization, and the applicant's primary professional work is for the media organization through which the applicant seeks a hard pass;

The applicant or the applicant's media organization has a record of substantial and original news coverage of the work of the Court;

The applicant will be present at the Court regularly for reporting purposes;

The applicant does not practice law before the Court and is independent of individuals and entities that practice law before the Court; and

The applicant has not been employed by the Court during the two years preceding the application for a hard pass.

Day Passes. To qualify for a day pass, an applicant must demonstrate:

The applicant is a journalist affiliated with a media organization or, as space allows, a writer who is not affiliated with a media organization; and

The applicant has a need to report from the Court on, or to observe, a particular Court session.

Exceptions. Applicants may be relieved of the need to meet the requirements listed above when necessary to address new or unanticipated situations, to prevent undue hardship, or to ensure fairness in the application of these requirements.

Procedures for Issuing Supreme Court Press Credentials.

Hard Passes. Individuals interested in applying for a full-time press credential from the Court should first contact the PIO at (202) 479-3211.

An applicant for a hard pass must submit a written application provided by the PIO that will require the following information:

The applicant's full name, affiliation, and contact information;

A statement that the applicant meets the requirements for issuance of the hard pass; and

Documentation that the applicant meets the requirements for issuance of the hard pass.

By August 1 of every year, a holder of a hard pass must apply to renew his or her credential. The applicant should submit applications to pio@supremecourt.gov.

Holders of hard passes must immediately inform the PIO when any requirement for a press credential is no longer satisfied.

If the PIO denies an application for a hard pass, it will provide a written statement of the basis for its decision. Before suspending or revoking a hard pass, the PIO will notify the holder, allow an opportunity to respond, and provide a written statement of the basis for its decision.

Supreme Court Hard Pass Application

Day Passes. Individuals interested in obtaining a day pass to cover a Court session should contact the PIO at (202) 479-3211. Seating in the Courtroom is limited and is provided on an as-available basis.