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ACLU-WV FIRES BACK AT COAL BARON OVER JOHN OLIVER LAWSUIT

WHEELING, W.Va. - The American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia (ACLU-WV) filed an amicus brief today in *The Marshall County Coal Company et al. v. John Oliver et al.* (Civil Action No. 17-cv-00099). The brief was filed in the United States District Court of the Northern District of West Virginia in response to Murray Energy Corporation's CEO Robert Murray's (Bob Murray) claim that the host of *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver* defamed his character. The ACLU-WV is petitioning the court to dismiss the case citing freedom of the press.

"Freedom of the press is absolutely critical to a democracy in which the government is accountable to the people," said ACLU of West Virginia Executive Director Joseph Cohen. "We are in the midst of an intense attack on the press from the most powerful people in government and industry. We will fight any attempt to bully the media or silence critics who dare to expose the truth regarding those in power."

On June 18, 2017, an episode of HBO's *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver* highlighted Donald Trump's focus on the coal industry, including his relationship to Bob Murray. Host John Oliver, a comedian, made multiple critiques of Murray and his business. In the lawsuit, Murray argues that several of Oliver's claims are libelous: that coal jobs are in decline, that the Crandall Canyon Mine disaster was the result of violated safety regulations, and that Murray disregards the well-being of his employees. Murray also took issue with Oliver's personal insults.

"When you are complaining in a legal document about a squirrel named Mr. NutterButter and being called a 'geriatric Dr. Evil,' something has gone terribly awry," says ACLU-WV Legal Director, Jamie Lynn Crofts. "John Oliver hurt Bob Murray's feelings. Luckily, thanks to the First Amendment, public figures like Mr. Murray can't sue comedians for making fun of them."

The case is before the Honorable Judge John P. Bailey. John Oliver has not made any direct public comments about his lawsuit. The ACLU-WV is dedicated to protecting the Bill of Rights and the Constitution at large in West Virginia.

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