

Panel Opens Drive to Reverse Ruling on Newsroom Searches

A Senate panel opened a campaign yesterday to reverse the Supreme Court ruling that permits police to obtain warrants for the search of newsrooms of a newspaper in connection with crimes unrelated to the newspaper's organization.

One month and a day after the Supreme Court handed down the Stanford Daily decision, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Barry Bayh (D-Ind.), began hearings on proposals to limit police access to newsroom offices.

In its ruling, the high court said news organizations have no special exemption from search warrants issued by local magistrates or judges at the request of police.

Critics said the ruling will permit politicians under investigation by a newspaper to obtain a search warrant from a friendly judge and cut short journalistic efforts to expose public wrongdoing.

Bayh, who is proposing sharp limits on searches of all homes or business of persons suspected of crimes, said the Stanford Daily ruling "has left us with a serious potential for

governmental abuse of our right to privacy."

Proposals to overturn the ruling through new federal law have drawn support from House members and liberal to conservative members of Congress.

Among those testifying in support of new limits on newsroom search warrants were Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas and John Heinz of Pennsylvania, and Reps. Robert D. Ertman (D-Iowa), James J. Jacobs Jr. (D-Ind.), and Carl Albert (D-Ind.).

Assistant Attorney General Ronald Phillip Heymann testified yesterday that the Justice Department has imposed rigorous limits on seeking federal search warrants for news organizations. Beyond that, he said, there is an extensive study underway of the national impact of the Stanford ruling.

Among representatives urging passage of a limit on police searches of newsrooms were Julian Goodman, chairman of the NBC television network; William Small, news director of CBS; Grant Dillman, Washington bureau chief of United Press International.