

First Amendment expert breaks down the difference between peaceful and lawful protesting

Published June 5, 2020

ATHENS, Ga. - "There's peaceful and then there's lawful," one First Amendment expert said.

Clare Norins is the director of the First Amendment Clinic at the University of Georgia School of Law. She says it's important to know the difference between the two when you're protesting.

She defines "peaceful" as marching, handing out flyers, and holding up a sign.

And of course, non-peaceful protesting includes: "Things like throwing a bottle or an object, setting something on fire, vandalizing property," Norins said. "That would not be considered peaceful."

Then there's lawful protesting, which is not always the same as peaceful.

"You can have peaceful unlawful protests, and we call that civil disobedience where people choose to intentionally block the entrance to a building or lie down in the street and block vehicular traffic," Norins said. "They aren't being violent, but they are intentionally breaking the law."

If anyone has been arrested, Norins recommends several things including asking for a lawyer and having a witness record the encounter.

"We have a long history of peaceful protests and demonstrations leading to social justice changes and reforms in our country," Norins said. "The right to collectively assemble and voice disagreement with the status quo, those are essential First Amendment rights that need to be respected and safeguarded."

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