

New Voices of Indiana



New Voices of Indiana is a grassroots project of Indiana college and high school journalists. Our aim is to protect student journalists from unfair and undemocratic censorship and punishment for telling stories about important political, social, and educational issues.

Why is this law needed?

Both the United States and Indiana constitutions guarantee freedom of speech and thought. After all, a free society requires its citizens to be well-informed. And Indiana's Constitution promotes education because knowledge and learning are "essential to the preservation of a free government." But far too often, students in our state's colleges and schools are punished and censored when they use that knowledge to express themselves and try to inform others.

Students are punished for expressing their political or religious opinion. And they're censored for covering issues like crime, health, and school policy. In one bizarre Indiana case, students were censored for writing an editorial about censorship.

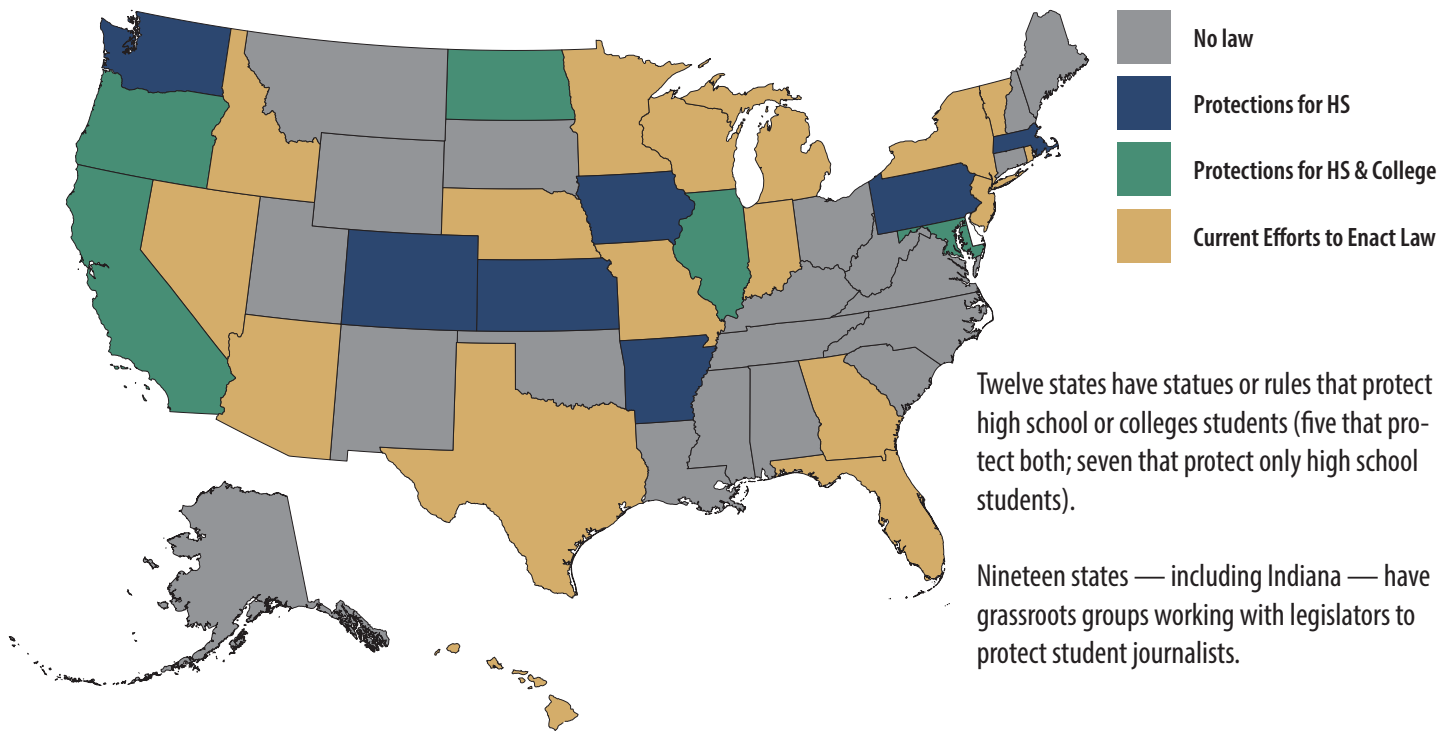
Censorship is detrimental for students and society. Punishing students for their speech teaches them that censorship, often arbitrary and without limits, is acceptable. But in a society dependent on journalists and the public keeping the government in check, we cannot afford to have curiosity and confidence bred out of our students. We cannot afford to stifle today's new voices because they are tomorrow's leaders and citizens.

Why do students need freedom of the press?

Students are the "embedded journalists" letting their communities know how effectively schools are performing. A Brookings Institution survey documents that just 1.4 percent of mainstream media is devoted to education news. If students are not free to disclose the shortcomings of their schools, the public is unlikely to find out. Study after study demonstrates that the only effective way of teaching civics in schools is for students to discuss contemporary political issues — which is exactly what school censorship prevents. Research by the University of Kansas documents that students who work in newsrooms supportive of press freedom report higher levels of civic effectiveness — the belief that they can use their voices to influence public policy.

How is this serving the greater good in teaching civics and professional skills?

This law guarantees student journalists are able to function free from viewpoint-based restrictions on what they publish. That's important to teach students civics. After all, censorship and punishment for political opinions today can lead to a hesitancy to express opinions later in life. The marketplace of ideas can't function with self-censorship.



Professional organizations including the Society of Professional Journalists and the American Society of News Editors support this New Voices movement. That’s because places free from censorship are the most educationally and professionally sound environments to teach the value and importance of journalism.

In an era where anyone can post anything online, student journalism provides guidance and training on how to use publishing tools responsibly. We should support that.

Won’t this open up the school to legal challenges?

A search of the Westlaw© and Lexis© case law databases shows a grand total of zero published cases in which a school district was held responsible for what students wrote in a student newspaper, magazine or yearbook. As a matter of historical fact, a school is more likely to be sued – and sued successfully – for violating students’ First Amendment rights by censoring a newspaper than by allowing the newspaper to publish uncensored.

The proposed law would protect lawful and non-disruptive content produced by student journalists. Schools could still deal with material that is libelous, likely to cause a substantial disruption, or is otherwise not legally protected. Ten states have such student free-press laws or administrative rules, some on the books for decades. No evidence shows a greater incidence of libel or other unlawful speech. In fact, a 2013 Maine Law Review study found only six instances of such laws being referenced in litigation. By clarifying the bounds of school censorship authority, these statutes likely avoid more litigation than they enable.

About us

We are a grassroots organization of college and high school students from across the state. Our goal is to help provide our fellow Hoosier college and high school student journalists with robust protections. We’re working with the Hoosier State Press Association, the Indiana High School Press Association, and the Indiana Collegiate Press Association to make this process educational by encouraging fellow journalists to learn more about Indiana and its General Assembly, including covering this process in our student publications over the course of the legislative session.