

HCS HB 576 -- CAMPUS FREE EXPRESSION ACT

SPONSOR: Dohrman

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Higher Education by a vote of 7 to 3. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Legislative Oversight by a vote of 7 to 3.

This bill modifies the Campus Free Expression Act. The bill requires the governing board of each public institution of higher education to adopt a policy on free expression by January 1, 2020. The free expression policy must be consistent with several principles of free speech specified in the bill. The free expression policy shall be made available to students and faculty annually.

The bill also requires institutions to adopt a "student-on-student harassment" policy.

The bill shall not be interpreted as prohibiting an institution from imposing restrictions on expressions that do not violate the United States Constitution or the Missouri Constitution.

This bill is similar to HCS HB 2284 (2018).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that current Missouri law does not go far enough to protect students and promote freedom of speech. Most colleges in Missouri currently have policies in place that limit speech or provide administration with too much discretion on what speech should be allowed.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Dohrman; 1st Amendment Partnership; and Tyler Coward, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that there are minor changes to the bill that would make it a better protection for speech on campus.

Testifying against the bill was American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that the classification of Missouri institutions of higher education by third party groups is unfriendly to freedom of speech, the institutions do not have clarification on how or why they are limiting freedoms without clear feedback and conversation, and a new law may not be necessary.

Testifying on the bill was Council On Public Higher Education.