

HCS HB 2918 -- STUDENT JOURNALISTS

SPONSOR: Miller

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 11 to 3 with 3 members voting present.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2918.

This bill establishes the "Cronkite Journalistic Standards and New Voices Act", which provides that in both public high schools and public institutions of higher education, a student journalist, as defined in the bill, has the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press in school-sponsored media if such media qualifies as a news source.

The bill defines "Cronkite Journalistic Standards" as standards required of a news source. Standards include but are not limited to; separating news and commentary, specific restrictions that commentary and editorial material may only constitute 10% or less of news sources; and news sources should not be perceived to support or oppose any covered subject.

In school districts, the district and student-media advisors may regulate the number, length, frequency, and format of school-sponsored media. School districts must not engage in prior restraint of school-sponsored media except in the circumstances specified in the bill.

Student journalists are responsible for determining the content of school-sponsored media, while student-media advisors are responsible for teaching and encouraging expression and the standards of English and journalism. No student-media advisor will be subject to disciplinary actions described in the bill for refusal to abridge or infringe upon freedom of expression.

No publication or other exercise of the rights provided under this bill shall be deemed an expression of school or institutional policy. No school district, institution of higher education, or employee of these entities will be held liable in any civil or criminal action for any publication or other exercise of rights provided under this bill, except to the extent that such an entity or person actively participated in conduct that is the subject of a civil or criminal action. School districts and their employees may also be liable if they knew of

the conduct and failed to take timely action to prevent or withdraw the publication or expression that is the subject of the action. Student journalists who are not minors may be liable based on material for which they were responsible or involved.

School districts must adopt a written freedom of the press policy that includes reasonable provisions for the time, place, and manner of student expression. The policy may also restrict speech that is offensive, threatening, or that fits other similar descriptions provided in the bill.

This bill is similar to SB 258 (2025).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the 1st amendment protection of the press is an important concept that should be protected for student journalists. Many states have similar language. Freedom of the press is important for democracy and essential for helping to keep administration honest. This language aligns with current jurisprudence and fixes the infringement impact from the Hazelwood court case from the 1980s. Personal testimony from students that are current members of school media staff indicated that having protections are very important to them in providing a quality product. Student journalism is part of the conscience of school and community and this language will function to preserve rights of students with guardrails.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Miller; The Student Press Law Center; Cathy Kuhlmeier, Cathy Kuhlmeier Foundation; Charlie Balestra; Haowen Liu; Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE); Missouri National Education Association; Shane Lagesse; Sophia Anderson; Arnie Dienoff; Missouri Press Association; and Americans For Prosperity.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say this clarifies tension between Supreme Court decisions on 1st amendment protections especially in regard to schools and universities.

Testifying in person on the bill was Jared Schroeder.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.