



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 2918		DATE: 2/11/2026
COMMITTEE: Elementary and Secondary Education		
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES		
WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: AMELIA HURLEY		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/6/2026 7:21 PM
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I am in support of implementing the practice of guaranteed free speech to scholastic journalists across the state. As I earned my master's degree at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, I dedicated my studies and thesis to whether student press freedoms are beneficial to student journalists. My research examined how censorship practices (prior review, prior restraint, and self-censorship) affect student journalists' development, how they perceive news values, and whether they decide to pursue journalism post-high school graduation. My findings determined three overall themes: (1) formal and informal censorship shapes which stories are pursued, softened, or avoided; (2) without the protection of student press freedoms, high school journalism advisors and administrators can function as institutional gatekeepers who influence editorial decisions; (3) restrictive environments undermine students' ethical development, while autonomous ones encourage confidence and critical inquiry. These findings suggest that students who experience editorial freedom are more likely to engage in meaningful reporting, think critically about ethical decisions, and remain involved in journalism or civic life beyond high school. On the other hand, restrictive environments can lead to a distorted understanding of journalism's purpose, often framing it as a vehicle for institutional promotion rather than public accountability.

Please feel free to take a look at my research, and reach out with any further questions. I urge you to consider this bill to further journalistic education in a time where it is more needed now than ever.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10355/109701>



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. AC "HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF		PHONE NUMBER: 314-440-9000	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MISSOURI STATE PUBLIC ADVOCACY		TITLE: STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE	
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CITY: O'FALLON		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63366
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/11/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: AYLA ROSE KIM		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/6/2026 10:41 PM
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As a now alumni of kirkwood high school, i always loved that our journalism was never silenced in any way. we were free to do express our opinions and put in stories about controversial topics. being able to put what we wanted into the yearbook and call is what made us stand out and it's always how we made national news. even now as kirkwood high school covers topics like ICE with new photos from local protests, posting them to social media for all to see.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: BENJAMIN WILSON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/11/2026 8:22 AM	
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Dear Members of the Committee:

The State of Missouri is renowned for journalism. Journalism education was founded here in 1908 at the University of Missouri’s School of Journalism. The military magazine Stars and Stripes was created here during the Civil War. Joseph Pulitzer, of Pulitzer Prize fame, started his career here. We have too many legendary journalists from this state to count. The bill before you is appropriately named after one of them.

But journalism education carries a black mark in Missouri. We are failing to instill First Amendment protection and values in high-school journalism—even though the First Amendment specifically guards freedom “of the press.” Instead, we permit school administrators who are *not* trained in journalism, or in its legal or ethical standards, to instill something quite different. Administrators can freely censor student publications that they object to for any reason.

As an attorney, I have confronted this issue. High-school journalism is controlled by the Supreme Court’s Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier decision, which imposes a vague standard that is hopelessly deferential to school administrators.

That is exactly the wrong approach, legally and ethically. As the U.S. Supreme Court once explained: “[E]ducating the young for citizenship is reason for scrupulous protection of Constitutional freedoms of the individual, if we are not to strangle the free mind at its source and teach youth to discount important principles of our government as mere platitudes.” West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette (1943).

The Cronkite New Voices Act offers us the chance to restore the First Amendment’s freedom of the press to high-school journalism in Missouri. It’s also the chance to remove an undeserved blemish on our state’s otherwise brilliant reputation for great journalism. This carefully crafted bill puts in place a clear standard that not only provides scrupulous protection for our student journalists but provides clear guidance for school administrators, who under this Act will not be liable or responsible for student publications they might disagree with.

I hope you will support the Cronkite New Voices Act. Thank you for considering my comments and other testimony offered today.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Wilson



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: CAMELLIA PETERSON		PHONE NUMBER: 417-726-9475
REPRESENTING: AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY		TITLE: LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
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CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 65102
EMAIL: cpeterson@afphq.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/11/2026 3:04 PM

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Free speech is foundational to individual liberty and applies to all individuals. Too often, students have their rights as student journalists imposed on by administrators attempting to control a narrative on school campuses or censor political speech. Americans for Prosperity Missouri urges the committee to protect this right for all students and pass HB 2918.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: CATHY KUHLMEIER		PHONE NUMBER: 417-894-3284	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: CATHY KUHLMEIER FOUNDATION		TITLE: FOUNDER OF CATHY KUHLMEIER FOUNDATION	
ADDRESS: 1014 WRIGLEY CIRCLE			
CITY: WARRENTON		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63383
EMAIL: cmkuhlmeier1965@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/9/2026 1:55 PM	
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I was the student at the center of the US Supreme landmark case Hazelwood v Kuhlmeier which covered censorship of the high school press . Censorship is still happening to students across the country today and needs to be stopped. My son was also censored in his junior year of high school . I travel and tell of my experience with this as is it is still relevant. Helping students cure Hazelwood has become my priority and I now run the Cathy Kuhlmeier Foundation to offer support to students who find themselves in similar circumstances.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: CHAD STEBBINS		PHONE NUMBER: 417-438-2181	
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI PRESS ASSOCIATION		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: 802 LOCUST			
CITY: COLUMBIA		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65201
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/11/2026 12:00 AM	

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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: CHARLIE BALESTRA		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: In-Person		SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2026 8:04 AM
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: DEVAN FOOS		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/9/2026 2:36 PM	

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New Voices bills are nonpartisan issues. I am a high school journalism adviser whose students were just blocked last month from covering a student led protest by building and district administration. This was a blatant attempt at censorship for the sake of public relations, not for the sake of truth telling or really any legitimate scholastic concern. My students have tried to have meetings with administration to get the appropriate clearance, but they keep running into more and more roadblocks. The silencing of my broadcast, newspaper and yearbook students has caused devastation across all classes that something was so clearly newsworthy and was deemed not fit for coverage. They don't even have photo or video, the opportunity to obtain their own photos and videos was ripped away from them because administrators thought they had that kind of power over journalists. In a day where administration allowed for average students to exercise their first amendment rights to protest, they simultaneously ignored my students' first amendment rights to press.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: DONALD JOHNSON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/11/2026 3:51 PM	
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I am Donald Johnson, a publications adviser and English teacher at Webster Groves High School. I have taught about 40 years, 37 years as a journalism teacher and 33 year at Webster. Most of my career I've had a good relationship with administrators who've supported student journalism. However, my first year of teaching in Arkansas, my yearbook was taken to task by a superintendent because we covered a European trip that students from the high school had gone on, but which was not explicitly sponsored by the high school. We also had backlash from the administration about other community topics we covered, but they'd never engaged in prior restraint. After leaving that district, I taught only English for three years in Texas, and then I moved to Missouri. The administrators were very supportive of the journalism program. However, several years ago for the first time in my entire career an administrator forced me to show an article before we went to press. It was suggested that I would be committing insubordination if I did not comply. Later one of my students was doing a story about alleged peer-on-peer sexual harassment. Administrators from the school in question gave a tremendous amount of pushback. Last year another administrator suggested to me in my evaluation that perhaps the school should go to prior review with a "group of trusted adults." Seeing such reversals in attitudes regarding the freedom of the student press is shocking to me. We spend a good deal of time in my journalism classes talking about ethics and law. We avail ourselves of resources like the Student Press Law Center.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: HALEIGH TRUMAN		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/6/2026 5:23 PM
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As the previous newspaper and yearbook adviser at Hazelwood East High School (2017-2025), I would like to offer my strong support of HB2918. Students in Missouri deserve the same First Amendment protections as professional journalists. Protecting their First Amendment press freedoms teaches real civic responsibility, encourages critical thinking and truth-seeking, builds trust and transparency in schools, and cements the promise that student voices matter. Again, I am in full support of this bill, and sincerely hope that we can provide the promise of true First Amendment equity to our very deserving student journalists.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: HAOWEN LIU		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: In-Person		SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2026 8:10 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: JONATHAN GASTON-FALK		PHONE NUMBER:
REPRESENTING: THE STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER		TITLE: STAFF ATTORNEY
ADDRESS:		
CITY: ELMWOOD PARK	STATE: IL	ZIP: 60707
EMAIL: jfalk@splc.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2026 8:16 AM
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The Student Press Law Center is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that, since 1974, works to promote, support and defend student press freedom. Our free legal hotline provides services to the very students and teachers who need this legislation, and we have been a large part of the passage of similar legislation in 18 states. We have worked closely with a coalition of Missouri student journalists, their media advisers, and others behind this effort in support for HB 2918, and we hope to be helpful to you in your efforts in any way we can.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: JONATHAN GASTON-FALK		PHONE NUMBER: 757-846-4304	
REPRESENTING: THE STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER		TITLE: STAFF ATTORNEY	
ADDRESS: 7815 W WESTWOOD DRIVE			
CITY: ELMWOOD PARK		STATE: IL	ZIP: 60707
EMAIL: jfalk@splc.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2026 3:10 PM	
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[This is in addition to in-person testimony planned for 2/11/26.] Thank you for considering HB 2918, restoring and protecting the press freedom of Missouri’s student journalists. The Student Press Law Center stands in strong support of this legislation, appreciates the opportunity to testify in-person at the committee hearing on February 11, and submits this written testimony as reinforcement. We are poised to discuss questions or concerns the committee may have regarding this legislation or other student press freedom matters.

The Student Press Law Center (SPLC) is an independent, non-partisan organization that, since 1974, has helped students of all ages participate in civic life and learn essential skills, ethics and values through the vehicle of journalism. Our hotline provides free legal services to student journalists and advisers. As such, we see daily the significant need for such legislation.

For almost four decades, Missouri’s student journalists have come of age under a U.S. Supreme Court decision originating in their very own backyard, a decision duly discredited by every journalism education organization in America. It is a decision that teaches them to doubt themselves and report what is popular instead of what is important to their communities, guarantees them less freedom of expression than every other student on campus, and places advisers at risk of professional consequences for trusting what their students are capable of. The legislation before you would undo this longstanding damage in Missouri.

Student journalists face a much different standard for censorship than most other students. Others are held to the so-called “Tinker Standard,” from Supreme Court’s Tinker v. Des Moines (1969) ruling that student speech cannot be censored unless that speech violates state and federal laws (including those against libel and slander, as well as privacy and copyright laws) or materially or substantially disrupts the school environment. Student journalists are beholden to the Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier (1988) decision, in which the Court ruled that student media censorship could simply be “reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.” Unfortunately, what constitutes “legitimate pedagogical concerns” has never been clarified or widely understood. The standard is unevenly practiced from school district to school district, creating a problematic patchwork of speech rights. We at SPLC have seen a real need in Missouri among student journalists: Their calls have unfortunately elevated the state as the third–most frequent to use our free legal hotline, and the fifth–most censored, in the country. It is impossible to know how many more student journalists haven’t called out of fear of retaliation by school officials. Stories covering anything from student mental health to alleged rodent problems in Missouri schools have been labeled controversial, and student voices have routinely been censored by administrations under the Hazelwood ruling. The most recent example has been out of a St. Louis area school, where students wanted to publish a dedication memorial honoring a fellow student who had passed away, but could not thanks to administrative fiat.

Nationwide, SPLC has seen yearbooks censored because students wore MAGA shirts or the swim team wore bathing suits, newspapers censored for reporting on graffiti visible to all students, and administrators restricting pieces providing oversight into the administrators' own activities. Award-winning advisers have been reassigned or fired for refusing to infringe upon students from reporting on, among other things, the high cost of feminine hygiene products, a vigil for a current student, the improper withholding of documents relating to an administrator's resignation, and curriculum changes. These are the ways in which student journalists learn about and critically think about the world around them, but are restricted from doing so simply because they prepare such investigations for publication. Despite the legacy of Hazelwood, students at Kirkwood High School have enjoyed a level of press freedom that every student journalist should have in the state. In 2023, their historic and award-winning yearbook garnered national and international media attention for the community backlash it received over some of its content. The administration stood behind its students, and the yearbook rightfully went uncensored. This is the legacy that student media could have in all of Missouri under HB 2918. No longer would student journalists across the state have different rights depending on the luck of where they attend school.

The result of Hazelwood censorship is not that students do not grapple with the issues that make adults nervous; it is simply that they do so disempowered by their administrators and informed by rumor and social media algorithms instead of rigorous fact-checking and journalistic ethics by trained professionals and trusted adults. The system implies students are incapable of the sort of discourse we expect them to engage in the moment they graduate.

We recognize there are instances in which administrators may need to exert authority to keep their students safe and the school day orderly. HB 2918 protects that authority; school officials can step in, for example, when there are concerns about an unwarranted invasion of privacy, or the media will be demonstrably disruptive to the school environment — the same "Tinker standard" they apply to all other students. HB 2918 merely ensures that students are no longer censored for subjective or ambiguous reasons, enables student journalists to tell the truth without fear of reprisal, protects capable and supportive advisers, and allows Missouri's schools to fulfill their mission to produce the engaged thinkers ready to be our next generation of leaders.

Missouri will join the eighteen states that have already enacted similar student press freedom laws. The verdict is clear: These laws do not impact the safety of the school or keep administrators from intervening when necessary. In no state has there been an outbreak of unethical journalism. In fact, lawsuits against high school student journalism programs are exceedingly rare; to date, we are aware of no published lawsuit in the country holding a school district liable for work published by its student media.

Thank you for your support of HB 2918, its nonpartisan aim of protecting freedom of the press in Missourian places of learning, and Missouri's student journalists.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: KELLEN HOARD		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/7/2026 2:51 PM	
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Dear Committee Members,

My name is Kellen Hoard, and I am a student journalist. I am submitting this written testimony in support of HB 2918, which protects student journalists from arbitrary and unjust censorship. I urge you to vote the bill out of committee as written.

As a student journalist myself—and one who received the Courage in Student Journalism award for protecting student free speech against an overreaching administration—I know how urgent and important it is to protect free expression by students in public schools. Student journalists are the backbone of their communities, providing reliable and verified information to students, parents, teachers, and neighbors.

Through participation in school-sponsored media, students develop critical thinking skills, become more civically engaged, and see their writing, test scores, and grades increase. Those lifelong lessons, and that crucial information source for communities, shouldn't be abridged because a taxpayer-funded school official censors a story in the newspaper they are embarrassed by. Censorship of students by school administrators is unacceptable, and can prove the difference between informed and misinformed students, accountability and apathy, and clarity and harmful ambiguity.

In a time when reliable local journalism is struggling, student journalists stem the flow of misinformation which is all-too-readily available to students and ensure accountable schools. This bill protects freedom of press while also placing robust and reasonable restrictions to ensure students follow rigorous ethical and legal standards in their reporting.

Eighteen states—including Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, and Illinois—have already passed common-sense, bipartisan laws identical to the one before this committee today. Missouri should be the 19th. I encourage you to support HB 2918 and, in turn, student journalists, as it seeks to ensure that freedom of speech is preserved, defended, and promoted in Missouri.

Thank you,
 Kellen Hoard



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: MARY PRICHARD		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2026 11:03 AM

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As an experienced Missouri journalism teacher at North Kansas City High School for the past 15 years, I know how important it is to protect free expression by students in public schools. I have seen firsthand how young journalists at NKCHS make meaningful impacts, not only through their reporting, but through the integrity, critical thinking, and civic responsibility they carry into their futures. I am testifying today to ask that you support the “Cronkite New Voices Act” HB 2918, which protects the free speech of student journalists.

My students today are learning the values of critical thinking, fact-checking, ethics, and fair discourse. Student journalists are essential to informed school communities, providing accurate, verified information to students, families, and staff. School-sponsored media strengthens students academically, and those benefits should never be compromised by censorship. When administrators silence student journalists, it undermines transparency and risks leaving students misinformed. Student voices deserve protection, not suppression.

HB 2918 protects both public high school and college students. I hope you support the bill – and, in turn, student journalists – as it seeks to make sure that freedom of speech is further preserved in Missouri.

Thank you,
Mary Prichard
North Kansas City High School



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: MEGAN PALMER		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/11/2026 3:33 PM
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I am in my 18th year advising student publications in Missouri and though I have never personally experienced censorship thanks to enlightened administration, I count myself lucky in that status as too many other advisers I know (in schools mere miles from mine) have been censored by their administrators for trying to cover issues important to students. Kansas has had these laws since 1992 and it doesn't mean their student journalists are running free and loose, printing whatever they want. The majority of my students these past 18 years have been wise beyond their years and truly more censoring of themselves than adults might ever be. Students (and advisers) should not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate, and this bill is an important one I have been fighting for my entire career. Please support it!



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL HURLEY		PHONE NUMBER:	
REPRESENTING: FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND EXPRESSION (FIRE)		TITLE: GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COUNSEL	
ADDRESS:			
CITY: PHILADELPHIA		STATE: PA	ZIP: 19106
EMAIL: michael.hurley@fire.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2026 4:04 PM	
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Chair Lewis, Vice-Chair Banderman, Ranking Minority Member Steinhoff, and members of the Elementary and Secondary Education committee,

My name is Michael Hurley. I am government affairs counsel at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, or FIRE. We are a nonprofit that advocates for the First Amendment rights of all Americans. FIRE has a long history of constructive engagement with Missouri lawmakers on campus free speech, dating back to the state’s adoption of our model Campus Free Expression Act in 2015’s SB 93, and carrying through to last year, when the state enacted SB 160 to protect belief-based student organizations. These measures have established Missouri as a leader in campus free expression.

Consistent with that history of engagement, I’m here today to support HB 2918. FIRE supports the bill in its entirety, but my testimony will focus on the higher education portion, where our expertise is most concentrated.

Student journalists provide important oversight at colleges and universities, exposing issues that might otherwise go undisclosed. At Northwestern University, for example, the student newspaper was the first to publicly report details of a hazing scandal within the football program that led to the head coach being fired. And in a now infamous incident at the University of Missouri in 2015, a student journalist captured footage of a professor asking for “muscle” to prevent him from covering a campus encampment.

At other times, student journalists perform the less flashy but no less important role of reporting and commenting on campus-centric controversies. The University of Missouri’s student newspaper, the Maneater, for example, regularly provides coverage and commentary on issues ranging from student-worker labor disputes to campus protests.

This reporting and oversight role is all to the benefit of university communities. But importantly, it also provides the next generation of journalists with real-world experience. Student journalists in college and high school alike should learn the habits of a free press, not the habits of censorship.

Despite this essential work, university administrators too often attempt to restrict or punish student reporters because they don’t like what they have to say. We recently saw a clear case of this at Indiana University, where the Indiana Daily Student used its front page to criticize the university’s record on

free speech. Ironically, the University responded to these allegations by ordering the paper to cease print publication and focus future print editions solely on special themes like homecoming or fall sports. When the faculty advisor refused to comply, he was fired.

Public universities shouldn't order students to publish puff pieces. They shouldn't shut down newspapers for coverage that makes administrators uncomfortable. And they shouldn't fire advisers who refuse to play the censorship game.

Fortunately, Indiana eventually backtracked. But cases like this are why HB 2918 is essential. This bill will ensure that student journalists are free to provide important reporting, oversight, and commentary without administrative censorship, and it will protect faculty editors and advisers who stand up for their students' rights.

Additionally, without HB 2918, the Supreme Court's decision in Hazelwood will continue to reign in high schools, giving administrators excessive leeway to censor student reporting. And the door would remain open for courts in Missouri to apply Hazelwood's logic to higher education, like the 7th circuit did in a case called *Hosty v. Carter*. HB 2918 cures Hazelwood and guards against cases like *Hosty*.

I would be happy to answer any questions on my testimony and HB 2918.

Regards,
Michael Hurley

Government Affairs Counsel, FIRE



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Testimony of Steven Listopad
Lecturer/Student Media Adviser at University of Central Arkansas, Arkansas
HB 2918, Student Journalists' Freedom of Expression
February 11, 2026

Thank you to the sponsors of this important bill, and thank you members of the Committee for hearing our testimony today.

My name is Steven Listopad. I'm journalism faculty and a student media adviser at the University of Central Arkansas. Previously I was at the University of Jamestown in North Dakota where my students wrote and passed the first bill known as New Voices. Since then I have become an expert on and advocate for the New Voices legislation, assisting students and advisers across the country. It is such a great honor to be able to submit my testimony to you today. Missouri has so many passionate and intelligent students, educators and professionals engaged in such a worthwhile civic activity and it is truly heartwarming to see. To have this opportunity to turn civic knowledge into civic action with our students makes me believe that, no matter the outcome, these years of work have been worth it.

My direct experience with successful New Voices legislation in both North Dakota and now Arkansas, where all 4 bills I have worked on directly have passed unanimously, helps me understand many of the issues and concerns of your state.

Just some quick background: The bill we are discussing today is necessary because of one unfortunate U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1988: Hazelwood. The Supreme Court in ruling for the Hazelwood school district over student newspaper editor Kathy Kuhlmeier stripped student journalists of the First Amendment protections they were afforded in a previous U.S. Supreme Court case: Tinker v. Des Moines.

There are two primary wrongs created by Hazelwood that are addressed by this bill: Journalism pedagogy needs to be based on the First Amendment not just in theory, which it is now, but in practice, to be effective, and... Students in general do not lose their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate, but, unfortunately, student journalists do because their expression resides within the curriculum.

I want to address several common concerns and misconceptions of New Voices bills that appear across the country:

Will HB 2918 allow students to publish anything they want?

No. By passing this bill you will give your student journalists the same speech protections that students can now exercise in the hallways and cafeterias and on the playgrounds. With HB 2918 you will give student journalists the same freedom of expression protections that apply to the clothes students choose to wear. That is all.

But couldn't student journalists already express themselves freely?

No. Hazelwood gave teachers and administrators complete authority over student speech inside the curriculum. Nearly all scholastic journalism programs are part of the curriculum. Some schools may honor student expression as defined by the Tinker Standard, but the law under Hazelwood doesn't require it and therefore most do not.

Will this bill prevent administrators from removing or punishing an adviser that is not doing their job?

No. This bill will only prevent administrators from removing or punishing an adviser for following the law. An adviser should not be retaliated against for allowing students to participate in the protected activity as defined in this bill.

Won't this lead to more lawsuits against the school when students make mistakes?

No. The schools are explicitly exempt from lawsuits resulting from the protected activity.

Won't this lead to more lawsuits from students claiming they've been censored?

No. To the best of our knowledge, over the combined 100-plus years of 16 states having these laws, there has not been one lawsuit that was decided by a judge or jury. And there have been only a handful of lawsuits at all.

Won't this lead to students publishing more provocative content?

There is no evidence of that when comparing states with New Voices laws to states that do not have them. In fact, in states without New Voices laws it is just as common to see faith-based content censored as it is to see provocative content censored.

What if our school or school district doesn't have a trained journalism educator even though we have a student medium?

While this scenario exists in all 14 New Voices states, we have yet to see students running amok with their media when a formal journalism program is not available.

We need to teach our students about civic facts, but we also need to teach them about civic engagement. We don't want the new voices in our world retreating to the dark recesses of the Internet to have important conversations. We want those conversations to happen in the light of day, where they can be cared for and nurtured. Our New Voices. We need to hear what they have to say – we need to hear what they ALL have to say. And only HB 2918 can make that happen. I am happy to answer any questions you may have as you deliberate. Please feel to reach out to me anytime.

Thank you.



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HB 2918 is a litigation engine disguised as a student-speech bill.

It abandons established First Amendment doctrine and replaces it with vague, internally conflicting standards that invite arbitrary enforcement, selective censorship, and retaliation claims against school districts and public universities.

The bill authorizes predictive prior restraint based on what an administrator or advisor “reasonably anticipates,” while simultaneously stripping those same actors of disciplinary authority and exposing them to after-the-fact liability if a court disagrees. That is not clarity. That is statutory sabotage.

Key terms—“violates the rights of others,” “likely to disrupt,” “professional standards,” and “timely action”—are undefined. These are not neutral standards; they are liability traps. Schools are forced to guess, and guesses lose in court.

HB 2918 also attempts to legislate around existing Supreme Court precedent rather than align with it. Student speech in public schools is already governed by constitutional law. When this statute inevitably conflicts with federal doctrine, it will not protect students—it will preempt nothing and cost taxpayers everything.

The bill further creates employment-law exposure by prohibiting discipline or reassignment of student-media advisors without providing any due-process framework for resolving misconduct, negligence, or supervisory failure. Districts are left defenseless, administrators are handcuffed, and advisors are placed in an adversarial posture with their employers by statute.

Finally, the liability disclaimer is illusory. Claiming that student publications are not “district policy” does not immunize public entities from civil rights claims, tort actions, or federal constitutional lawsuits. Courts do not honor legislative wish-casting.

The predictable result of HB 2918 is not freer speech.

It is more lawsuits, higher insurance premiums, risk-averse censorship, and taxpayer-funded settlements.

This bill should not advance in its current form.

Passing it after being warned of these risks will make the General Assembly—not schools—the

proximate cause of the harm that follows.

Footnotes

Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier, 484 U.S. 260 (1988).

The U.S. Supreme Court held that public schools may exercise editorial control over school-sponsored student speech so long as the actions are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns. HB 2918 attempts to statutorily override this framework while still operating within federally governed First Amendment space.

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).

Student speech may be regulated where it would materially and substantially disrupt the work and discipline of the school. HB 2918's "reasonably anticipates" standard expands prior restraint beyond Tinker's disruption requirement, inviting viewpoint-based enforcement.

Morse v. Frederick, 551 U.S. 393 (2007).

The Court reaffirmed that student speech rights are not coextensive with adult speech rights and may be restricted in school settings to protect institutional interests, particularly where safety and order are implicated.

Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser, 478 U.S. 675 (1986).

Schools may discipline lewd, vulgar, or offensive speech inconsistent with educational missions. HB 2918's vague language regarding "professional standards" and "vulgar or offensive language" lacks the definitional precision required to safely implement Fraser-based discipline.

42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Creates civil liability for deprivation of constitutional rights under color of state law. Statutory ambiguity that induces viewpoint discrimination or retaliatory enforcement exposes school districts and individual administrators to federal civil-rights litigation.

Board of Regents of State Colleges v. Roth, 408 U.S. 564 (1972).

Establishes that public employees possess property and liberty interests protected by procedural due process. HB 2918 restricts disciplinary authority over student-media advisors without supplying alternative due-process mechanisms, creating constitutional risk.

Pickering v. Board of Education, 391 U.S. 563 (1968).

Governs public-employee speech and retaliation claims. HB 2918 forces advisors into a statutory conflict between employer obligations and student expression, heightening First Amendment employment litigation exposure.

Grayned v. City of Rockford, 408 U.S. 104 (1972).

Laws regulating speech must provide clear standards to avoid arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement. HB 2918's undefined terms ("violates the rights of others," "timely action," "professional standards") raise classic vagueness concerns.

Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville, 405 U.S. 156 (1972).

Vague laws that encourage selective enforcement violate due process. HB 2918 invites discretionary censorship decisions that will be challenged as unconstitutional.

Missouri Constitution, Article I, § 8.

Guarantees freedom of speech and press, subject to responsibility for abuse of that liberty. Missouri courts interpret this provision in harmony with federal First Amendment jurisprudence, not in isolation from it.

Missouri Constitution, Article I, § 10.

Protects due process rights. Statutory schemes that impose liability without clear standards or procedural safeguards risk invalidation under state constitutional law.

Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658 (1978).

Municipal entities may be held liable under §1983 when constitutional violations result from official policy or statute. Enactment of HB 2918 itself may constitute the actionable policy.



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Thank you so much for your time today.

My name is Jared Schroeder and I research and teach freedom of expression and emerging technologies at the Missouri School of Journalism.

I want to use my brief time before this committee today to help provide context to the Cronkite New Voices Act.

>> The Supreme Court determined students and teachers have First Amendment rights while in the public schools. (See Tinker v. Des Moines)

>> The Court realized, however, that the educational setting is not the same as a public forum. So, the Supreme Court noted: Student speech can “cannot be prohibited unless it ‘materially and substantially interfere[s] with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school.’”

>>The Supreme Court ruled in Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier administrators can limit student press rights – but they did not overturn their previous decision in Tinker. What this bill does is it CLARIFIES the distance between Tinker and Hazelwood.

>>This is not a radical bill. It does not take administrators’ power to maintain the educational environment. Lines 31-41 outline eight instances when student rights can be limited.

>>If students want to publish a pro-drug message or defame someone, for example, that can be stopped. The bill follows the Supreme Court’s guidelines – substantial threats to the educational environment can be limited. That is explicitly in the bill. Admin power is in the bill.

>>It clarifies administrators’ roles as well. The district is not liable for what is published. The content does not represent school policy.

>>This is not a radical bill. 18 other states have passed this bill. Including nearly every state that neighbors ours. Conservative states, liberal states. North and South.

>> I want to close with the idea that our schools are civic institutions. They teach students how to be Americans – in a lot of ways. If we teach them to have no rights. That the First Amendment means nothing, then I worry that will be a lesson they take into their lives. This bill takes great care to protect

administrators' roles in this process. It also aligns carefully with the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First Amendment.

>>Thank you for your time today.