

Resolution No. 9: Need for Legal Protection for Student Journalists and Advisers

Submitted by Frank LoMonte, executive director of Student Press Law Center and SPJ Member Michele Day

Delegate action:

WHEREAS journalism advisers have been removed from their positions at an alarming rate at colleges and universities nationwide, including during the past year at Fairmont State University, Northern Michigan University, Delta State University, Butler University and Muscatine Community College, and;

WHEREAS high schools in Langhorne, Pa., Rochester, Mich., and elsewhere throughout the country have placed their students under punitive “prior review” arrangements in response to students’ substantive coverage of issues of social and political concern, and;

WHEREAS outstanding high school journalism educators have been replaced in Shelton, Conn., Northern Highlands, N.J., and other schools throughout the country following conflicts with school administrators over lawful, non-disruptive editorial content.

WHEREAS the censorship of scholastic journalism disproportionately impacts the ability of young women, who make up the vast majority of high school newsrooms, to develop their voices as leaders and to be heard on matters of public importance;

WHEREAS state legislation such as the New Voices Act of North Dakota, which became law this year, can offer a measure of needed protection to student journalists and advisers against institutional retaliation;

WHEREAS the First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the freedom of the press, and those protections do apply to students, and such freedoms enable student-run publications to make vital information known to the community,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, meeting in convention at Orlando, Florida, commends the North Dakota legislature and the New Voices of North Dakota, led by Professor Steve Listopad, for their efforts in enacting the New Voices of North Dakota Act.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Society urges its members to support and actively encourage the passage of similar state legislative protections for the independence of student media across the country.