

2017 -- H 5550

LC001039

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2017

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- STUDENT JOURNALISTS' FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
ACT

Introduced By: Representatives O'Grady, Maldonado, Kazarian, Keable, and  
Blazejewski

Date Introduced: February 16, 2017

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended  
2 by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 107

4 STUDENT JOURNALISTS' FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ACT

5 **16-107-1. Short title.**

6 This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Student Journalists' Freedom of  
7 Expression Act".

8 **16-107-2. Definitions.**

9 As used in this section:

10 (1) "School-sponsored media" means any material that is prepared, substantially written,  
11 published, or broadcast by a student journalist at an institution under the supervision of the  
12 council on elementary and secondary education and the council on postsecondary education, both  
13 public and private, distributed, or generally made available to members of the student body, and  
14 prepared under the direction of a student media advisor.

15 (2) "Student journalist" means a student of an institution under the supervision of the  
16 council on elementary and secondary education and the council on postsecondary education, both  
17 public and private, who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records, or prepares  
18 information for dissemination in school-sponsored media.

1 (3) "Student media advisor" means an individual employed, appointed, or designated by  
2 an institution under the supervision of the council on elementary and secondary education and the  
3 council on postsecondary education, both public and private, to supervise or provide instruction  
4 relating to school-sponsored media.

5 **16-107-3. Student journalists' freedom of expression -- Civil remedy.**

6 (a) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, a student journalist has the right  
7 to exercise freedom of speech and of the press in both school-sponsored media and non-school-  
8 sponsored media, regardless of whether the media is supported financially by the school, local  
9 education agency (LEA), or uses the facilities of the school or LEA, or produced in conjunction  
10 with a class in which the student is enrolled. Subject to subsection (b) of this section, a student  
11 journalist is responsible for determining the news, opinion, feature, and advertising content of  
12 school-sponsored media. This subsection may not be construed to prevent a student media advisor  
13 from teaching professional standards of English and journalism to student journalists.

14 (b) This section does not authorize or protect expression by a student that:

15 (1) Is libelous or slanderous;

16 (2) Constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;

17 (3) Violates federal or state law; or

18 (4) So incites students as to create a clear and present danger of the commission of an  
19 unlawful act, the violation of school district policy, or the material and substantial disruption of  
20 the orderly operation of the institution. Administrators must base a forecast of material and  
21 substantial disruption on specific facts, including past experience in the school and current events  
22 influencing student behavior, and not on undifferentiated fear or apprehension.

23 (c) A student journalist may not be disciplined for acting in accordance with subsection  
24 (a) of this section.

25 (d) A student media advisor may not be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned,  
26 transferred, or otherwise retaliated against for:

27 (1) Acting to protect a student journalist engaged in conduct under subsection (a) of this  
28 section; or

29 (2) Refusing to infringe on conduct that is protected by this chapter or the First  
30 Amendment to the United States Constitution.

31 (e) Each institution, school or LEA subject to this statute may adopt a written student  
32 freedom of expression policy in accordance with this section. The policy must include reasonable  
33 provisions for the time, place, and manner of student expression. The policy may also include  
34 limitations to language that may be defined as profane, harassing, threatening, or intimidating.

1           (f) No institution subject to this statute may sanction a student operating as an  
2 independent journalist.

3           (g) Any student, individually or through parent or guardian, or student media advisor may  
4 institute proceedings for injunctive or declaratory relief in any court of competent jurisdiction to  
5 enforce the rights provided in this section.

6           SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T  
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- STUDENT JOURNALISTS' FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
ACT

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- 1           This act would create the Student Journalists' Freedom of Expression Act protecting
- 2 student journalists' right to exercise freedom of speech in school-sponsored media.
- 3           This act would take effect upon passage.

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