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2019: The Year of the Student Journalist

This Year Will Highlight the Importance of these Students and the Need to Support Them and Their Work

WASHINGTON — Today the Freedom Forum Institute, the [Newseum](#) and [the Student Press Law Center](#) declare 2019 the Year of the Student Journalist. This announcement is made in recognition of the important role of student journalists, the impact they make, the challenges they face and to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1969 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, which defended the free press and free speech rights of students.

As part of the launch of the Year of the Student Journalist, dozens of high school and college newspapers from across the country are publishing editorials and op-eds underscoring the need to protect student press freedoms. Those articles are all being curated at www.splc.org.

This morning, the Newseum showcased student newspapers in its Front Pages display on Pennsylvania Avenue and will continue to do so throughout the year. The museum has also committed to incorporating content into the displays about the current situation of student journalists.

Student journalists play a key role in the civic life of their community. Not only do they report on important issues in the life of a school or school district, but as the number of professional journalists has dwindled, student journalists often also fill the gap in reporting on county, state and regional issues. In 2014, [a Pew research study](#) found that student journalists made up 14% of the overall state house reporting corps. That number is certainly higher today.

But student journalists and journalism education programs are under pressure. Student journalists have lesser First Amendment protections and are often subject to censorship, prior review, budget battles and other external pressures. In the past year, students broke important stories about teacher misconduct (Utah), improper transfer of student athletes (Arkansas) and disciplinary charges by a state agency against an administrator (Vermont). School administrators censored each of these stories in an effort not to make the school look bad. In Texas, after students published editorials critical of the school

administration, the paper was suspended and the unhappy principal banned all student editorials. In each case, the stories were reinstated, but the framework which allows for such censorship remains.

The Year of the Student Journalist will also highlight state-based student-led efforts to protect student press freedom and to prevent retaliation against advisers standing up for the First Amendment rights of their students. [New Voices protections](#) are in place in 14 states and are currently pending in 8 more.

Journalism education is an important part of training the next generation in civic engagement and responsible oversight of the public sphere. The skills learned in working in student media help create engaged citizens and lifelong critical thinkers. In addition to becoming professional journalists, former student journalists have gone on to become Supreme Court Justices (Assoc. Justice Elena Kagan), the head of the Federal Reserve Bank (Janet Yellen) and CEOs of major corporations (Apple CEO Tim Cook).

By highlighting the Year of the Student Journalist, the Freedom Forum Institute, the Student Press Law Center and their partners seek to raise the profile of the impact of student journalists, highlight the challenges they face and focus on the importance of journalism education in the development and maintenance of a vibrant civic culture.

Support the Year of the Student Journalist by using the hashtag **#studentpressfreedom**. More information about activities and events throughout the year can be found at www.splc.org/YoSJ. This powerful theme for the year will emphasize the importance of student journalists and the need to support them and their work.

ABOUT THE FREEDOM FORUM INSTITUTE

The [Freedom Forum Institute](#) is the education and outreach partner of the [Freedom Forum](#) and the [Newseum](#). The Institute includes the [First Amendment Center](#), the [Religious Freedom Center](#), the [Newseum's education department](#) and diversity and inclusion programs. The Freedom Forum Institute's affiliate organizations include the [Al Neuharth Media Center](#) at the University of South Dakota, the [Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics](#) at the University of Mississippi and the [John Seigenthaler Center](#) at Vanderbilt University. The Freedom Forum Institute is a 501(c)(3) public charity funded by generous individuals, corporations and foundations, including its principal funder, the [Freedom Forum](#).

ABOUT THE STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER

Since 1974, the [Student Press Law Center](#) (SPLC) has been defending and supporting the First Amendment and free expression rights of student journalists in the United States. Operating at the intersection of law, journalism and education, the SPLC fields nearly 2,000 inquiries each year on its [free legal hotline](#) from students and advisers, provides more than 60 training workshops per year, and provides a wide variety of online resources to student journalists and advisers at splc.org. The SPLC also engages in programmatic initiatives to promote [New Voices](#) student press protections and to amplify the destructive effects of censorship on student journalists. Based in Washington, D.C., the SPLC is an independent, staunchly non-partisan 501(c)(3).