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SPLC creates Nick Ferentinos New Voices Fellows Program to support “New Voices” student press rights movement

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Student Press Law Center announces the establishment of the Nick Ferentinos New Voices Fellows Program, to support students to advocate for state-based student press freedom. The program is being established thanks to the San Francisco-based [Sandler Foundation](#), which has granted the Student Press Law Center \$150,000 over three years to grow the New Voices movement, a national nonpartisan grassroots campaign which seeks to create state-based protections for student press freedom rights for student journalists and their advisers.

The New Voices movement emerged after the [Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier](#) case was handed down by the United States Supreme Court in 1988. That case gave school administrators the right to censor the work of student journalists for “any reasonable pedagogical purpose” – a vague, overbroad standard which has led administrators to censor stories which may reflect poorly on the school, create controversy, or upset parents.

Currently, fourteen states have press freedom protections for student journalists. The New Voices movement includes advocates in law, education, journalism and civics from across the political spectrum who want schools and colleges to be more welcoming places for student voices. In 2019, reflecting growing awareness about the need to protect press freedom for student journalists, a record eleven more states introduced New Voices legislation. To learn more, go to: splc.org/new-voices.

The grant was made by the Sandler Foundation to honor the memory of Nicholas “Nick” Ferentinos, a renowned journalism adviser who died in 2016. Ferentinos taught English and speech at Homestead High School in Cupertino, Calif. from 1965 to 2000 and was faculty adviser for the award-winning student newspaper *The Epitaph* from 1976 to 1994. *The Epitaph* was the 1988 recipient of the Student Press Law Center’s Courage in Student Journalism Award, honoring its tenacity in telling the story of an HIV positive student. The principal at the time tried to prevent the story from being published in the aftermath of the *Hazelwood* case.

“It was my great fortune to be on The Epitaph staff at Homestead with Nick Ferentinos,” said Steve Daetz, executive vice president of the Sandler Foundation. “He was an extraordinary teacher and mentor to hundreds of students. When our principal wanted to stop publication of an important story immediately after the Hazelwood ruling in 1988, Nick fully supported our staff’s decision to publish with the backing of

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a state law. This fellowship at SPLC will empower others to advance state laws that are critical to student journalists.”

“There is no greater way to honor the legacy of Nick Ferentinos than to fight for the core of what he believed in – a free and open student press, where advisers can teach good journalism, and students can report truth. We are deeply grateful for the Sandler Foundation’s commitment to Nick’s ideals and its support of SPLC’s efforts to grow this important grassroots campaign.” said Hadar Harris, executive director of the SPLC. “This generous grant will help ensure that schools and colleges are more welcoming places for student voices.”

“Nick was a champion of students’ First Amendment Rights and of the SPLC. He would be so proud and humbled to receive this honor in his memory,” said his widow, Dina. “Nick’s dream was for every student journalist in our country to have their First Amendment Rights protected. The Sandler Foundation’s generous grant will help further this goal.”

In addition to funding outreach and training for the New Voices movement, the grant will establish the Nick Ferentinos New Voices Fellows Program, to enable student activists to work as grassroots peer organizers and trainers, to help the New Voices movement grow and gain momentum.

Neha Madhira has been selected as the first Ferentinos New Voices Fellow. Madhira gained national attention when her newspaper, the Eagle Nation Online at Prosper High School (Texas), was repeatedly censored in 2018 by school administrators, leading to an outright ban on student editorials and the nonrenewal of their award winning veteran journalism adviser. She has since become a [spokesperson for student press freedom](#) and has been a key organizer of the New Voices efforts in Texas. In August, Madhira is heading to the University of Texas, Austin for her freshman year.

As Dina Ferentinos noted: “Nick and I were married for 50 years and I feel that every day was a gift. In these rather dark days for journalists, Nick’s ideals are needed now more than ever and this remembrance of him helps keep his dream alive.”

The Student Press Law Center ([splc.org](#), [@splc](#)) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working at the intersection of law, journalism and education to promote, support and champion the rights of student journalists and their advisers at the high school and college levels. The SPLC provides information, training and legal assistance at no charge to student journalists and the educators who work with them.

Spearheaded by [SPLC](#), the [Freedom Forum Institute](#) and the [Newseum](#), 2019 is the Year of the Student Journalist. The year consists of high-profile national programming and local student-led events designed to raise awareness about the important role of student journalists, the struggles they face, the need for state-based legislation to protect the First Amendment rights of student journalists and their advisers ([New Voices](#)), and to validate the importance of journalism education.