



SPLC Statement on Student Media as Essential Service During COVID-19

Student journalists, like professional journalists, play a unique and essential role in news gathering and reporting, particularly in a time of crisis. Their efforts should not be limited or censored during this critical time. Rather, they must be supported and encouraged as part of providing an essential service to the community during the current COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

As of March 23, 2020, 46 states have ordered schools and universities to close in the wake of the spread of the coronavirus, affecting more than 54.8 million students across the country. As schools are suspended, students sent home, distance learning is instituted and school experiences fundamentally changed, students have experienced a profound life-altering shift in their world. Student journalists at both the high school and college levels are now at the front lines of reporting on one of the biggest stories of the pandemic.

The Student Press Law Center strongly urges that student news media be fully supported to maintain the critical public service of gathering and conveying fact-based information and news throughout this crisis.

In order to ensure sustained support for student news media, the Student Press Law Center calls on school and university administrators to do the following:

- Maintain uninterrupted financial and administrative support for student news media;
- Refrain from opportunistic restructuring of student news media;
- Enable student journalists to make and maintain their own content and editorial decisions, free of censorship and prior review;
- Maintain transparent and open government access, including prompt fulfillment of public records requests and accessibility of public meetings (including through remote channels).

Student journalists have played an essential role in covering this crisis in a myriad of ways: they have kept the student body informed of closures or modifications to their school schedule that are otherwise not covered by local news, and have alerted the school community to developments that affect the student body. They have revealed gaps in the communication between administrators and students, shared how the pandemic has affected sports and other

extracurricular activities and reported on the particular experience of exchange students whose home countries are facing lockdowns. They have communicated the most recent medical advice directly to students. A compilation of their excellent reporting can be found [here](#).

Most importantly, they have continued this work safely and responsibly while enduring challenges while working remotely, collaborating electronically and following appropriate social distancing protocols.

Young journalists provide a unique, essential perspective at this time. They understand and can identify issues that their older colleagues might miss. They speak their readers' language and provide a trusted forum for young voices to share their concerns and have their questions answered. In a school community, student-produced journalism can be an invaluable part of civic engagement and community building during a time of social distancing.

This is the time to redouble our commitment to the student press, not undermine it.

The Student Press Law Center urges student journalists facing barriers in their reporting to contact us at splc.org/legalrequest/