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Student Press Law Center commends New Jersey and Gov. Phil Murphy for codifying student press freedom

WASHINGTON — The Student Press Law Center (SPLC) commends the State of New Jersey and Gov. Phil Murphy for their recent passage and today’s signing of S108, “New Voices” legislation to restore and protect the press freedom of New Jersey’s student journalists. New Jersey is the 15th state to adopt such legislation.

The bill, which was first introduced in 2015 and passed the legislature unanimously earlier this year, prohibits the censorship of student journalists except in narrow circumstances. It will also protect student media advisers from retaliation when they refuse to illegally censor their students. The bill takes effect immediately.

The adoption of New Voices is critical to reversing the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1988 *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* decision which created an intentionally vague and problematic standard for censorship of student-produced work. It is commonly used by school administrators to censor student journalists for vague and subjective reasons often related to the reaction of adults to student media rather than the quality of the media itself. In New Jersey this has included suppression of articles critical of a school superintendent, discussing the smoking of students in school bathrooms, and even an article about the censorship of student media. Today’s action by Governor Murphy ensures student journalists can pursue quality journalism on the issues of importance to their schools and their communities.

“Congratulations to New Jersey for becoming the 15th state to codify student press freedom through New Voices legislation,” SPLC executive director Hadar Harris said. “Signing S108 is an important step but it is only the beginning. We need robust implementation of the new law and need administrators, students and advisers to understand it. SPLC will remain vigilant and be a vital resource to student journalists and their advisers in New Jersey. When censorship happens, we’ll be there standing up for the rights of student journalists.”

The Student Press Law Center along with New Voices advocates will work to ensure every New Jersey school understands how the new law impacts the rights of student journalists.

The Student Press Law Center (splc.org, @splc) is an independent, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit working at the intersection of law, journalism and education to support, promote and defend the rights of student journalists and their advisers at the high school and college levels. Based in Washington, D.C., the Student Press Law Center provides information, training and legal assistance at no charge to student journalists and the educators who work with them.