

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 3, 2021

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Student Press Law Center is concerned about censorship at Howard University's *The Hilltop*

WASHINGTON — The Student Press Law Center stands in support of the student journalists with *The Hilltop* at Howard University. We are deeply concerned about the unusual and harmful comments and steps taken by *The Hilltop*'s staff adviser to restrict student journalists covering campus protests.

Founded in 1924, *The Hilltop* describes itself as “the nation’s oldest black collegiate newspaper.”

[According to *The Hilltop*'s statement published November 2, 2021](#), student journalists are being forced to send all breaking news stories to their adviser, Keith L. Alexander, “for editing” before publication. On several occasions, *The Hilltop* staff say their adviser has forced the editing or removal of stories related to the ongoing #BlackburnTakeover protests about the condition of Howard University’s student housing.

The Hilltop staff say the adviser’s demand to approve stories prior to publication came on October 13 after *The Hilltop* published a story which recapped the second day of protests about mold, wifi and water outages in the dorms. *The Hilltop* editors say they received an email from their adviser on Oct. 8 stating that Howard University President Wayne A.I. Frederick was “irate” about a column published October 4.

Mandatory prior review — requiring that an administrator or adviser read and approve a story prior to publication — is a practice condemned by every major journalism education organization in the country. At public colleges it has also been ruled illegal. Prior restraint — outright censorship — of stories relevant to the student body like what has been reported at *The Hilltop* is even worse. Student publications are the voice of the student body and their job is to report the stories that are important to students.

The well-established role of a student newspaper adviser is not to direct, restrict or otherwise control the content independently produced by the student publication’s staff, but to guide and empower students to use their voices. The Student Press Law Center has materials that are helpful to new advisers and we welcome conversations with educators.

“Censorship of student journalists is always unacceptable and Howard University’s attempts to control student’s voices are alarming,” Hadar Harris, executive director of the Student Press Law Center said. “There has been widespread media coverage of the #BlackburnTakeover

protests and alumni are speaking up on behalf of the students and the journalists who tell their stories. We stand with *The Hilltop* staff. Censorship will not work.”

We will continue to monitor the situation at Howard University and stay in contact with the student journalists at *The Hilltop*.

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Student Press Law Center: *Since 1974, the Student Press Law Center has worked to support, promote and defend the First Amendment and freedom of expression rights of student journalists at the high school and college level, and the advisers who support them. Working at the intersection of law, journalism and education, SPLC runs the nation’s only free legal hotline for student journalists. We also provide training, educational resources and support the grassroots non-partisan New Voices movement, seeking state-based legislative support for student press freedom. The SPLC is an independent, non-profit 501c(3) organization based in Washington, D.C.*