

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 3, 2022

## **Principal Arranges Removal of Student Editorial Criticizing School Drug Searching Policy**

*Author say censored editorial presents a factual, legal case against policy changes; press lawyer says editorial is not disruptive to school environment*

**TEXARKANA, TX**— *April 29, 2022* Hours after promotion on social media, Advisors of the *Tiger Times* were contacted by Texas High School Administration and advised to remove the editorial “Students, not suspects” for disruption to the school environment.

According to Mike Hiestand, Senior Legal Counsel at the Student Press Law Center, review of the article was found to not fit the standard used on what constitutes disruptive speech in schools.

“The editorial is very well written and legally clean,” Hiestand said. “It is not disruptive as that term has been interpreted by courts.”

The Student Press Law Center was contacted by the author of the editorial, *Tiger Times* Editor-In-Chief Doug Kyles, after his article was removed from the newspaper’s website.

“I knew the article would likely be scrutinized,” Kyles said. “However, I ensured it would be legally clean and factually correct to ensure it wouldn’t get censored. I certainly didn’t expect the school to go this far to silence student voices.”

Kyles had been questioned on the article by an associate principal after its initial release. The principal claimed that the article was negative towards the school’s administration and not conducive to the school’s view of what the student-led newspaper should accomplish.

In the *Tiger Times* column, Kyles wrote that he felt THS had “facilitated an environment of fear and distrust” by ramping up K9 searches of student vehicles. Among other things, he pointed to students (who consented to their inclusion in the article) who “likely could have been approached and offered healthier ways to deal with the issues that have led him to drug use” before they faced felonies on their records that would undermine their plans for the future.

“It’s not necessarily an argument against administrators protecting the safety of students, but against the objective of using whatever means possible to convict and remove as many students as possible for whatever drugs they are found with,” he wrote.

School officials did not dispute the facts contained in the editorial, Kyles said.

Representatives of the Student Press Law Center — a nonprofit group in Washington, D.C., that provides legal help to student media (and a group that boasts former *Tiger Times* EIC Sommer

Ingram as a Staff Attorney) — said the administration's justification for ordering the removal of the article is not legally sufficient.

"The First Amendment makes clear that public school officials can't censor otherwise lawful student speech simply because they think it makes the school look bad," Hiestand said.

Kyles believes the censorship is all about school officials wanting to protect the school's image, and prevent parents becoming upset with the idea that their sons and daughters are being searched with no reasonable suspicion.

"They want a public relations newsletter that is full of happy stories. Well, the fact is we are a newspaper. We report the news — and not all news is happy news. Myself and many others think Texas High School can be better than it is. That's all I was and am trying to say. And — as students of THS affected by the decisions made here — I think we should all be allowed to say so."

To protest the school's censorship, many supporters of the editorial took to Instagram and reposted screenshots of the 404 error page brought up when one follows the link that previously led to the article.

Kyles said he has made sure the article is available for viewing off of the paper's website and accessible through public links. SPLC has stated their intent to seek publication of the article in local media outlets and on their own website.

"I am extremely proud of the publication I've been able to serve for these past years. However I would be remiss to allow its censorship on the charges that aren't even true," Kyles said. "I think it's ridiculous I've been forced to pursue outside action, but I don't plan on stopping until the article is re-published in its original form."

The link to the editorial is: [shorturl.at/iouHJ](https://shorturl.at/iouHJ)

Contact:

Doug Kyles, Editor-in-Chief *Tiger Times* at [doug.kyles@tigertimesonline.com](mailto:doug.kyles@tigertimesonline.com)

Student Press Law Center: (202) 785-5450

*The Tiger Times is the award-winning, student-edited newspaper at Texas High School in Texarkana, Texas.*