

A YEAR OF EMPOWERING

BOLD JOURNALISM

& BRAVE ADVOCACY



2022-2023
ANNUAL REPORT

About SPLC

Vision: The Student Press Law Center envisions a world where all student journalists are respected, know their rights, and are protected by law to express themselves freely as full and essential members of a healthy democratic society.

Mission: The Student Press Law Center promotes, supports and defends the First Amendment and free press rights of student journalists and their advisers.

What We Do

SPLC is the only legal organization devoted exclusively to supporting student journalists. Every day, we empower students' **bold journalism** about their communities and **brave advocacy** for their First Amendment rights by:

- Instilling legal confidence and countering censorship with our **legal hotline, pre-publication review, attorney referral network** and **ongoing support** (pp. 3-5)
- Equipping students with knowledge and resources through our **trainings, guides** and **other resources** (p. 6)
- Elevating student journalism and taking action for press freedom on **Student Press Freedom Day** (p. 7)
- Organizing and advocating to expand press freedom through the **New Voices movement** (pp. 8-9)

That's why we always tell students:

**Write the story.
We've got your back!**



SPLC staff at the Spring 2023 National High School Journalism Convention.

Board of Directors

As of October 2023. Affiliations listed for identification purposes only.

Kelly Furnas, chair, Elon University

Lynette Clemetson, vice chair, Director, Wallace House Center for Journalists at the University of Michigan

Michael Bolden, treasurer, Executive Director and CEO, American Press Institute

Ava Lubell, recording secretary, Assistant General Counsel, Dow Jones

David Baumgarten, General Counsel, The Atlantic Monthly Group LLC

Angela Buonocore, Retired Corporate Communications Executive

Matthew Cate, Associate, Ballard Spahr LLP

Shawn Healy, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy, iCivics

Steven A. Holmes, Retired Executive Director of Standards & Practices, CNN

Pratika Katiyar, Student, Northeastern University

Tracy Schmalzer, Founder, Oxbow Strategic Communications Consulting

Andrea Valdez, Managing Editor, The Atlantic

Wendy Wallace, Director of Foundation Relations, Poynter Institute

Hannah Wise, Audience Development Editor, Kansas City Star & Wichita Eagle

2022-23 HOTLINE

750+

INQUIRIES

2000+

STUDENTS & ADVISERS

46

STATES (PLUS D.C.)

60+

PRE-PUBLICATION
REVIEWS

HOTLINE & ONGOING SUPPORT

Instilling Legal Confidence & Countering Censorship

SPLC's **free legal hotline** is the historic core of our work and the first line of defense for student journalists looking to obtain legal support, have their media law questions answered or fight censorship. SPLC attorneys respond to every inquiry by educating students about their legal rights and providing strategic advice to help them confidently report stories that matter.

Many of the inquiries to the hotline relate to day-to-day newsgathering and publishing issues, including questions about **copyright, photographer's access, advertising, reporters' privilege, defamation and privacy**, and more recently, **artificial intelligence**.

When **overt or indirect censorship** occurs, SPLC stands ready to support the students and adviser by providing guidance and education on the law, and, if they choose, by bringing public pressure to bear on the administration through coalition letters, media attention, op-eds and more. When a case requires direct representation by a local attorney, SPLC calls upon our **network of more than 250 pro bono media law attorneys**.

Growing role of student reporting brings growing complexity

As student media are increasingly stepping in to fill the void left by an ever-shrinking world of commercial news outlets, more students are reporting news stories that are far-removed from covering school sporting and social events, topics that dominated their parent's student newspapers.

Not surprisingly, more complex reporting — whether it's covering local government, controversial school board meetings, slumlords that prey on students or the latest sexual harassment scandal — goes hand in hand with more complex media law issues. Moreover, student journalists are emerging as important civic watchdogs at a time when all journalists face attacks on their work, their newsrooms and, in some cases, themselves.

SPLC has responded to these increased complexities and threats, in part, by providing deeper and more ongoing support, including through the **pre-publication review** of stories to flag potential issues and reduce legal risk. During the height of the 2022-2023 school year, SPLC attorneys reviewed several stories a week, including complex sexual harassment reporting and investigations of financial or operational misconduct on campus.

SPLC Empowers Bold Journalism & Brave Advocacy Across the Country

Overturing Adviser Retaliation

In **California (#1)**, SPLC helped Los Angeles adviser Adriana Chavira successfully fight illegal disciplinary action after her students refused (also with SPLC's help) to alter an accurate news story about the impact of the district's COVID vaccine policy on school employees.

Administrators suspended Chavira for three days without pay and put a disciplinary note in her file for refusing to censor her students. SPLC sent a letter signed by 22 partners spelling out how the district's actions were a clear violation of California's student free expression law. We also helped generate media pressure and connected Chavira with pro bono counsel. The district expedited Chavira's appeals hearing and withdrew the disciplinary action.

"SPLC was there from the beginning all the way to the end, giving us feedback, giving us direction, just hearing us out about what's going on... I don't think I would have been able to keep my sanity if it wasn't for [SPLC]..."

— Adriana Chavira



Ensuring Compliance with the Law

In **Washington State (#8)**, SPLC worked with students and pro bono counsel at Davis Wright Tremaine to push the Olympia School District to adopt a robust student free expression policy, a requirement of the New Voices law passed four years prior. Within just three months of SPLC's intervention, the district adopted the policy and student journalists reported fewer issues covering their school community.

Praising Defenders of Student Press Freedom

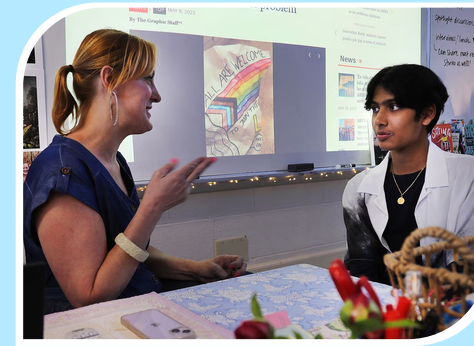
In **Missouri (#7)**, SPLC sent a public letter thanking Kirkwood High School administration for defending their students' editorial control over the yearbook after some parents objected to coverage of hook-up culture, drugs and alcohol at the school. SPLC also provided comments in the media, helping to educate the public on the importance of robust and free student media.

Standing Up to Indirect Threats

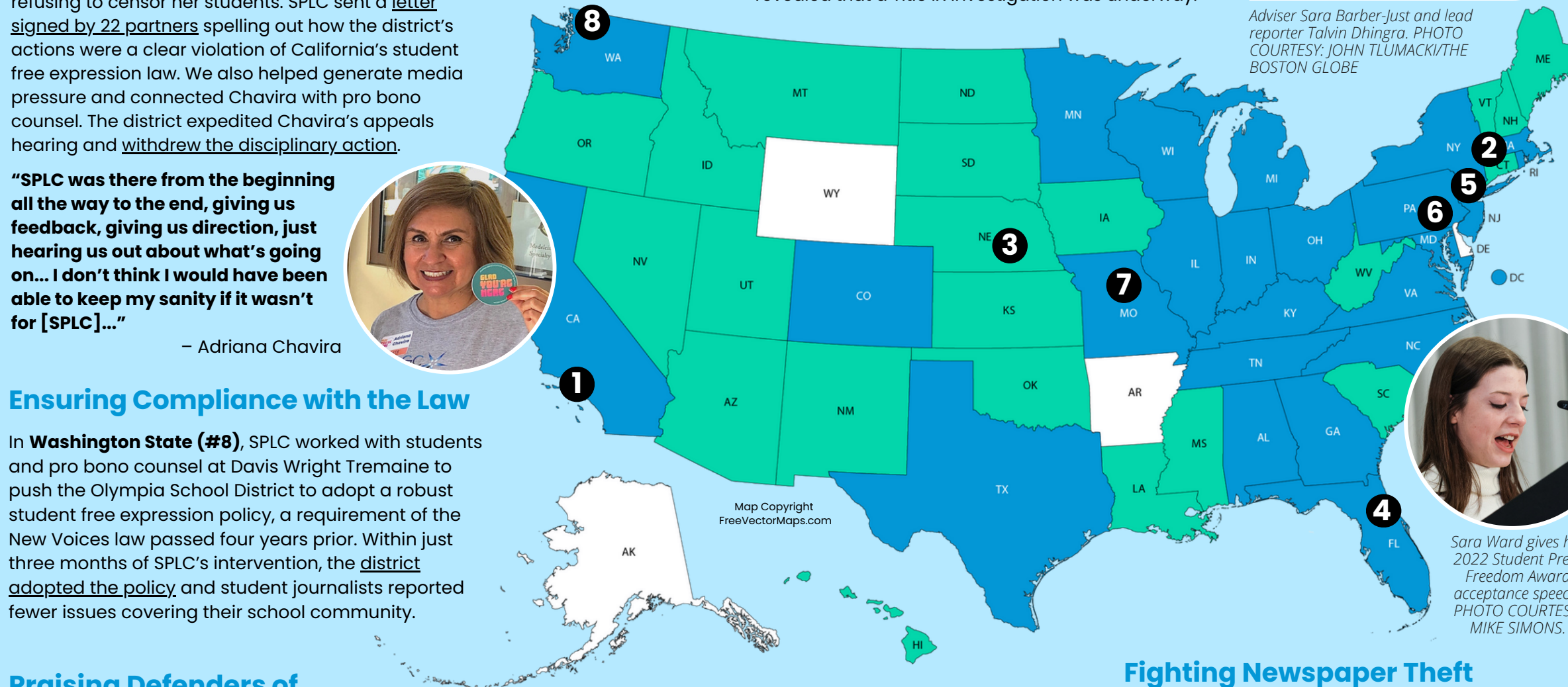
In the **Southwest U.S.**, SPLC worked with college student media to push back against an administrative threat to reduce school advertising after an administrator objected to lawful content published in the paper's annual April Fool's issue.

Giving Confidence in a Major Story

In **Massachusetts (#2)**, SPLC provided pre-publication review for an investigation into anti-trans and LGBTQIA+ bullying at the local middle school by Amherst Regional High School's student newspaper. As the Boston Globe reported, the story "forced a district shake-up," with multiple district staffers placed on or taking a leave afterward — including the superintendent. It was also revealed that a Title IX investigation was underway.



Adviser Sara Barber-Just and lead reporter Talvin Dhingra. PHOTO COURTESY: JOHN TLUMACKI/THE BOSTON GLOBE



Sara Ward gives her 2022 Student Press Freedom Award acceptance speech. PHOTO COURTESY: MIKE SIMONS.

Stopping Censorship

In **Pennsylvania (#6)**, SPLC attorneys assisted a high school paper in successfully contesting the threatened censorship of an end-of-year issue featuring a map of seniors' college and other post-graduation plans, a longstanding tradition that school officials sought to end.

Fighting Newspaper Theft

SPLC helped students at colleges in **New Jersey** and **New York (#5)** work with local law enforcement who were initially reluctant to investigate a series of newspaper thefts on their campuses. Newspaper theft is a problem fairly unique to campus media, which are often paid for with student activity fees in advance but distributed on an honor system. Over the years, SPLC has conducted considerable research on the issue of theft of free-distribution publications and helped establish a fairly consistent body of law finding that it is a crime.

Addressing Systemic Censorship Head On

The SPLC hotline is often a bellwether for larger cultural issues, and when questions spiked about **LGBTQIA+-related censorship** — well before the targeting of the LGBTQIA+ community garnered national attention — SPLC developed a multi-pronged strategy to address it. SPLC not only helped fight individual cases, but we also created resources and trainings that help students proactively prepare for these issues.

In **Nebraska (#3)**, SPLC attorneys provided ongoing legal support to students and an adviser at Northwest High School, where administrators forbade the student newspaper's use of chosen names and pronouns and then shut it down after students published an LGBTQIA+ issue. After SPLC brought national attention and helped connect students with pro bono counsel, one former student is now suing the school for violating the First Amendment.

In **Florida (#4)**, we supported Lyman High School's 2023 yearbook editor Sara Ward as she defended to outside groups, parents and the school board her staff's decision to publish content recognizing the school's LGBTQIA+ community. The staff won SPLC's Student Press Freedom Award for successfully battling similar censorship in the 2022 yearbook.

SPLC attorneys also proactively educated students and advisers, as the passage of new legislation across the country prohibiting discussion of sexual identity or using chosen names or pronouns in the classroom raised questions about their impact on student media. SPLC published a **Guide to Names and Pronouns in School-Sponsored Student Media**, which was reviewed by partners at the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. The legal team also offered multiple **training sessions** on the topic at the fall and spring National High School Journalism Conventions, with high attendance demonstrating how widespread these issues are.

The marginalized and underrepresented — and stories about them — are more likely to face censorship. SPLC continues to monitor trends on our hotline so we can respond quickly and give students the tools they need to tell the important stories of their communities.

TRAINING & GUIDES

Equipping Students with Knowledge & Resources

Through a robust offering of **trainings, workshops, institutes, guides** and **other resources**, SPLC educates thousands of students each year, particularly on:

- the First Amendment
- newsgathering legal issues
- civics
- leadership
- press freedom advocacy

Some of the 2022–2023 school year’s highlights include:

Conventions & Summer Workshops

SPLC presented 68 sessions to nearly 2,700 student journalists and their advisers at the national student media conventions, as well as some state and regional events.

Our staff also taught in person or virtually at **16 summer journalism workshops**, including at American University, University of Florida, NYU Urban Journalism Workshop, Asian American Journalists Association, Boston University, University of Georgia, Washington State University and Arizona State University, among others.

SPLC in the Classroom

Our attorneys educated another **880 students — 376 high school, 504 college — from 20 states** through SPLC in the Classroom. This program reaches students who cannot travel to a convention by allowing educators to book an SPLC attorney to virtually speak with their class or newsroom on a media law topic of their choice.

Institutes with PEN America

SPLC partnered with PEN America to present the virtual **Global Press Freedom Advocacy Institute** and the in-person **Global Press Freedom Student Summit** in New York. Both educated students about press freedom around the world and equipped them with skills to fight censorship and disinformation at home.

Legal Guides

We added to our extensive library of free online educational resources including guides, slide presentations and quizzes, with a new **Guide to Names and Pronouns in School-Sponsored Student Media**, **Sports Media Toolkit** and **School Board Advocacy Toolkit**.

SPLC Staff Attorney Jonathan Gaston-Falk leads a training at a 2023 high school convention.



3700+

STUDENTS & ADVISERS
EDUCATED

100+

TRAININGS & WORKSHOPS
IN 23 STATES PLUS D.C.



STUDENT PRESS FREEDOM DAY • FEB. 23, 2023

Elevating Student Journalism & Taking Action for Press Freedom

The fifth annual Student Press Freedom Day featured students, advocates and peer organizations partnering to celebrate and protect student journalism.

In a wide range of SPLC-initiated and organic activities in the days and weeks leading up to Feb. 23, students wrote op-eds about their experiences and reported on the unjust challenges they face in their roles. Students also hosted seminars with professional journalists, competed in student press freedom trivia, hosted a SPF Day carnival at school and even baked cookies to raise money for student press freedom. Student reporters from historically Black colleges and universities across the country participated in a press briefing with Vice President Kamala Harris and Senior Advisor for Public Engagement Keisha Lance Bottoms.

SPLC gathered more than 30 organizational partners — our largest group ever — to widen our reach and increase the Day's impact. Using their unique expertise, partners hosted workshops on filing FOI requests, resisting censorship, staying secure online and more. Partners also recorded podcasts, hosted Twitter Spaces and produced video packages about student press freedom.



Above: Students at St. Paul Academy and Summit School (Minnesota) hosted a bake sale to support SPLC.



Left: University of Texas at Arlington journalists set up a booth to celebrate the day. PHOTO COURTESY: UTA RADIO



Student Press Freedom Day is a nationwide movement to celebrate student journalists, raise awareness of censorship and other press freedom violations they face and encourage them to take action to protect their First Amendment freedoms. Each year, SPLC supports students, advocates and partners in organizing many activities and taking action across the country.

The 2023 theme was **Bold Journalism, Brave Advocacy**, highlighting the incredible work student journalists do every day, despite routine attempts to silence them.

Some SPLC Activities Leading Up to the Day

- Take-action events with guests Mary Beth Tinker (*Tinker v. Des Moines*) and Cathy Kuhlmeier (*Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*)
- Op-ed workshop with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Steve Holmes
- Op-Ed Coaching Program, pairing 15 students with professionals, resulting in op-eds in The Washington Post, CNN and other outlets
- School district policy advocacy workshop and toolkit
- Student-led community forum on overcoming censorship
- Student Press Freedom 101 workshop

Organizing & Advocating to Expand Press Freedom



New Voices is an **SPLC-coordinated, student-powered nonpartisan grassroots movement to protect student press freedom with state laws.** These laws counteract the impact of the 1988 *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* Supreme Court decision, which created a First Amendment carve-out for student journalists and permitted administrators broad discretion to censor them. New Voices laws restore a standard where student editors make editorial decisions except in narrow and clearly defined circumstances.

SPLC’s advocacy strategy has grown and evolved over the past few years, and we now see strong momentum for student press freedom. Three new state laws passed within 15 months from 2021 to 2023, and we have seen a growing interest among students in addressing press freedom at the local level by improving their school districts’ student media policies. We have recognized, though, that new laws and policies are just the first step, as these tools are not helpful if students, teachers and administrators do not know about or follow them. Thus, SPLC continues to grow our efforts to educate stakeholders in New Voices states, hold districts accountable to the law and monitor and fight threats as they arise.

Supporting coalitions in passing New Voices laws

SPLC helps more than a dozen coalitions of advocates across the country develop strategies, identify bill co-sponsors, understand draft language (based on our [model bill](#)) and navigate New Voices bills through the legislative process. Through these efforts, **New Voices legislation was introduced in eight states** in the 2023 legislative cycle, and **West Virginia became the 17th state to codify into law** protections for student journalists that nullify the detrimental effects of the Hazelwood decision.

With guidance and materials provided by SPLC, **nearly 100 students and teachers participated in lobby days** in [New York](#), [Texas](#) and [Pennsylvania](#), where they met with more than 150 legislators and staff members. These visits resulted in several new legislative co-sponsors and will serve as effective models moving forward.

UPWARD MOMENTUM

Since December 2021, New Voices laws have been adopted in...



Meaning, in total...

10 million

high school and college students in 17 states are protected by New Voices laws.



Above: New York High school students traveled to Albany in February.

Right: Pennsylvania high school students traveled to Harrisburg in June, including Shreya Vaidhyanathan, who spoke at a press conference.



Student Leaders Institute

Our 2023 New Voices Student Leaders Institute welcomed a record **33 students from 13 states**. The institute is a free, two-week online program for high school students to improve their leadership and organizing skills, develop their role as leaders within the New Voices movement and identify the best strategy to expand student press freedom in their communities. Hear from some of those students:

“ I joined the Institute to learn more about advocacy and came out with more confidence, brainstorming skills and a community.



Maggie LeBeau
Illinois

“ Being able to listen and learn from past Institute participants made me realize how much resilience, courage and patience are involved in leadership.



Luisa Sanchez
Kentucky

“ I cannot wait to put what I have learned, the communication abilities I've developed, the critical thinking skills I've practiced and the allies I have found across the country to work.



Nicole Lupo
Pennsylvania

Creating strategies to implement legislation

To ensure each New Voices law is implemented and honored, we now proactively inform school and district administrators about the requirements of newly adopted laws, and we are educating students about their rights in every New Voices state.

After the West Virginia law passed in March, SPLC sent letters and our model policy to every school board president and superintendent in the state informing them of the law and its requirement to implement a complementary district policy. As of August, two districts had already adopted versions of our model policy, and SPLC is monitoring the other 53 school districts for compliance with the law.

In New Jersey, we monitored adherence by a sample of 100 school districts to their 2021 law's requirement to adopt a policy, and we published an op-ed in The New Jersey Star Ledger highlighting the lack of compliance. We called on the state education commissioner to issue guidance to districts, and we continue to work with local advocates to ensure adoption of required policies in all 593 of the state's school districts.

SPLC also continued to work with Hawaii's Board of Education as they moved to adopt a student free expression policy required by that state's 2022 law (Hawaii has only one school district). SPLC engaged a local attorney in anticipation of the need for legal enforcement, and we are working with advocates on the ground to raise awareness of the law's requirements and to urge expedient compliance.

Empowering students to investigate their policies

Even in states without a New Voices law, school districts can protect free and robust student media through district policies. We used Student Press Freedom Day this year as an opportunity to launch our new School Board Advocacy Toolkit that walks students through how they can find and, if necessary, advocate for changes to their school district's policies on student media.

Monitoring and highlighting emerging threats

SPLC also monitored and raised awareness of several emerging threats to student press freedom in state legislatures across the country, including bills that would limit classroom discussions by faculty and students.

Our 2022 Donors

The Student Press Law Center gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the organizations and individuals who helped us promote, support and defend the free press rights of student journalists. The list below represents those who gave \$500 or more to SPLC in 2022. We also thank the more than **250 individuals, student media programs, journalism associations and other organizations** who contributed under \$500 in 2022 to support our work. Thank you!

Organizations

Democracy Fund
 Edouard Foundation
 Garden State Scholastic Press Association
 Illinois Community College Journalism Association
 JEA of Northern California
 Kent State University News Corp
 Skyline Foundation
 TEGNA Foundation
 The Gridiron Club and Foundation
 Washington Journalism Education Association
 Western Association of University Publication Managers

Individuals

Logan H. Aimone
 Linda S. Barrington
 Michael Beder
 Jane Eisner and Mark Berger
 Robert Bertsche
 Michael Bolden
 Candace Bowen
 John Bowen
 Dorothy Bowles
 Michelle L. Breidenbach
 Angela Buonocore
 Brendan Burns
 Patrick Carome
 Matthew Cate
 Kevan Choset
 Benjamin Cotton
 Stefanie Dazio
 Wayne L. Dunn

Thomas Eveslage
 Kelly Furnas
 Mark Goodman
 Ryan and Elizabeth Gunterman
 Dennis Herman
 Gilbert Holmes
 Steven A. Holmes
 Gregory Jao
 Timothy Jasionowski
 Patrick J. Kuhnle
 Richard Landesberg
 Frank LoMonte
 Ava Lubell
 Scott MacLeod
 David McCraw
 Jane McDonnell
 Gloria Olman
 Matthew Pakula
 Karen Possner
 Laura Lee Prather
 John Reque
 Henry Rome
 Scott Sachnoff
 Paul and Ann Sagan
 Amy Kristin Sanders
 Pablo Schklowsky
 Tracy Schmaler
 Kathy Schrier
 Rebecca Sipos
 Andrew Stark
 Rosalind and Martin Stark
 Edmund Sullivan
 Charles Tobin
 Andrea Valdez
 Fern Valentine
 Daniel Vogt
 Katherine S. Ward
 Thomas N. Whitehead
 Matthew Winkler

Your support powers a press freedom movement

George Washington University student **Kellen Hoard** was among the first generation of high school journalists in Washington to report under the state's new student press freedom law, passed in 2018. Now, he's set out to make sure student journalists in other states enjoy the same rights he did.



Kellen turned his attention to West Virginia this past year, joining other grassroots advocates in their three-year push for New Voices legislation.

And together, they got it done. In March, West Virginia became the 17th state to protect student press freedom through legislation. Kellen sees SPLC's role as key to keeping up the momentum.

"The strength of SPLC is amplified many times over by its empowerment of advocates on the ground, and the first course of action for anyone seeking to expand New Voices nationwide should be to invest in the SPLC," Kellen said.

A New Era Heading into Our 50th Anniversary

In November 2022, **Hadar Harris** announced she would be stepping down as executive director after five years growing SPLC's reach and impact.

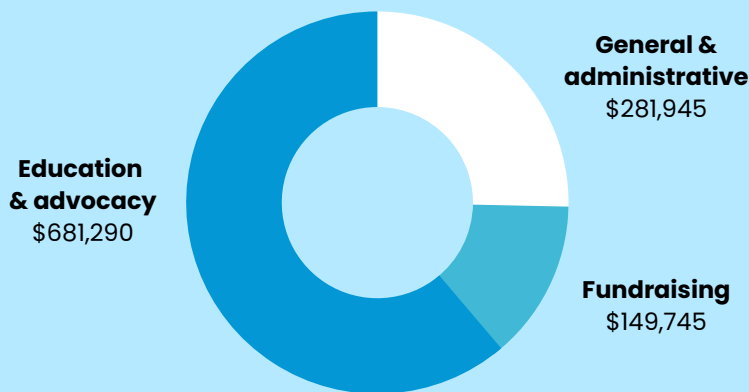
The Board of Directors conducted a nationwide search for our next leader and selected **Gary Green**, a veteran journalist, First Amendment advocate and accomplished leader who moved to higher education to train the next generation of journalists. Green previously led multiple university-based, student-driven newsrooms, most recently as executive director of the Center for Sustainable Journalism at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. He began as executive director in April.

Under Green's leadership, SPLC will celebrate our **50th anniversary in 2024** at a time when student journalists serve a more important role than ever in the news ecosystem, but while press freedom continues to face unprecedented challenges. For SPLC to effectively meet these challenges, we must expand the partnerships and resources that support our critical work. Please consider contributing at splc.org/donate or emailing director@splc.org to discuss ways you can join the effort to support bold and brave student journalism.



2022 Audited Expenses

We continue to invest in strategic growth to meet the growing and changing needs of student journalists:



In 2022, we increased our spending by 14% to \$1,112,980 as we grew thoughtfully to meet key goals of our strategic plan. We hired a second full-time attorney in March 2022, and we added the new positions of assistant director and communications fellow in August 2022 to evolve our internal capacity and to expand our outreach and engagement efforts. **Find more financial information at splc.org/financials.**

Staff

Hillary Davis, Advocacy & Organizing Director

Danielle Dieterich, Digital Strategist (through July 2023)

Jonathan Gaston-Falk, Staff Attorney

Gary Green, Executive Director (starting April 2023)

Hadar Harris, Executive Director (through February 2023)

Mike Hiestand, Senior Legal Counsel

Grayson Marlow, Advocacy Associate (starting June 2023)

Alexis Mason, Outreach & Operations Manager

Josh Moore, Assistant Director

Devin Yingling, Communications Fellow



Since 1974, the Student Press Law Center has promoted, supported and defended the First Amendment and free press rights of student journalists at the high school and college level, along with the educators who work with them. SPLC is a nonpartisan nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., but working throughout the United States.

Please note our new mailing address:

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Washington, DC 20006

202-785-5450 • www.splc.org

