STATE OF NEW YORK

7355

IN SENATE

January 9, 2018

Introduced by Sen. O'MARA -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Education

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to enacting the student journalist free speech act

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. The education law is amended by adding a new article 18 to read as follows:

ARTICLE 18

STUDENT JOURNALIST FREE SPEECH ACT

Section 860. Short title.
861. Definitions.
862. Student journalist free speech rights.
863. Exemptions.
864. Liability.

§ 860. Short title. This article shall be known and may be cited as the "student journalist free speech act".

§ 861. Definitions. For the purposes of this article the following terms shall have the following meanings:

1. "School official" means a high school principal or the designee of such principal.

2. "School-sponsored media" means any material that is prepared, substantially written, published, or broadcast by a student journalist at a public school, distributed or generally made available to members of the student body, and prepared under the direction of a student media advisor. The term does not include media intended for distribution or transmission solely in the classroom in which the media is produced.

3. "Student journalist" means a public high school student who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records, or prepares information for dissemination in school-sponsored media.

4. "Student media advisor" means an individual employed, appointed, or designated by a school district to supervise or provide instruction relating to school-sponsored media.

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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§ 862. Student journalist free speech rights. 1. Except as otherwise provided in section eight hundred sixty-three of this article, a student journalist shall have the right to exercise free speech and of the press in school-sponsored media, regardless of whether the media is supported financially by the school district or by use of school facilities or produced in conjunction with a class in which the student is enrolled.

2. Subject to section eight hundred sixty-three of this article, the appropriate student journalist shall be responsible for determining the news, opinion, feature, and advertising content of school-sponsored media.

3. Nothing in this section shall preclude a student media advisor from teaching professional standards of English and journalism to student journalists.

4. There shall be no prior restraint of material prepared for official school publications except for the material described in section eight hundred sixty-three of this article.

5. School officials shall have the burden of demonstrating justification without undue delay prior to a limitation of student expression under this article.

§ 863. Exemptions. The following forms of expression shall not be protected by this article:

1. Expression that is libelous, slanderous or obscene;

2. Expression that constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;

3. Expression that violates federal or state law; or

4. Expression that incites students to commit an unlawful act, to violate the policies of the school district, or to materially and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of the school.

§ 864. Liability. No expression made by students in the exercise of free speech or freedom of the press protected by this article shall be deemed to be an expression of school policy, and no school district, employee, parent, legal guardian or official of a school district shall be held liable in any civil or criminal action for any expression made or published by students, except in cases of willful or wanton misconduct.

§ 2. This act shall take effect immediately.