

STATE OF NEW YORK

1594

2019-2020 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 15, 2019

Introduced by Sens. O'MARA, HOYLMAN -- 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 Assem-
bly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The education law is amended by adding a new article 18 to
2 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.

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

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

14 1. "Educational institution" means a public, private or charter middle
15 or high school.

16 2. "School-sponsored media" means any material that is prepared, writ-
17 ten, published, or broadcast by a student journalist at an educational
18 institution, distributed or generally made available to members of the
19 student body, and prepared under the direction of a student media advi-
20 sor. "School-sponsored media" shall not include media intended for
21 distribution or transmission solely in the classroom in which the media
22 is produced.

23 3. "Student journalist" means a student enrolled in an educational
24 institution who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records,
25 or prepares information for dissemination in school-sponsored media.

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

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1 4. "Student media advisor" means an individual employed, appointed, or
2 designated by an educational institution to supervise or provide
3 instruction relating to school-sponsored media.

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

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

14 3. Nothing in this section shall preclude a student media advisor from
15 teaching professional standards of English and journalism to student
16 journalists or from grading the performance of a student in accordance
17 with such standards.

18 4. There shall be no prior restraint of material prepared for official
19 publications of an educational institution except for the material
20 described in section eight hundred sixty-three of this article.

21 5. Educational institution administrators shall have the burden of
22 demonstrating justification without undue delay prior to a limitation of
23 student expression under this article.

24 6. No student media advisor or employee shall be dismissed, suspended,
25 disciplined, reassigned, transferred, or otherwise retaliated against
26 solely for acting to protect a pupil engaged in the conduct authorized
27 under this article; and further no student media advisor or employee
28 shall be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned, transferred or
29 otherwise retaliated against solely for an action, undertaken in good
30 faith with this article, which results in the prohibition of the publi-
31 cation of speech pursuant to this article.

32 7. Political expression by students in school-sponsored media shall
33 not be deemed the use of public funds for political purposes.

34 8. This section shall not apply to any private middle or high school
35 that is controlled by a religious organization, to the extent that the
36 application of this section would not be consistent with the religious
37 tenets of the organization.

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

40 1. Expression that is libelous, slanderous or obscene;

41 2. Expression that constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;

42 3. Expression that violates federal or state law; or

43 4. Expression that incites students to commit an unlawful act, to
44 violate the policies of the educational institution, or to materially
45 and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of such educational
46 institution.

47 § 864. Liability. No expression made by students in the exercise of
48 free speech or freedom of the press protected by this article shall be
49 deemed to be an expression of policy, opinion or position of the educa-
50 tional institution, nor shall any such expression be considered to be an
51 endorsement in any way by the educational institution and no educational
52 institution, student media advisor, employee, parent, legal guardian or
53 administrator of an educational institution shall be held liable in any
54 civil or criminal action for any expression made or published by
55 students, except in cases of willful or wanton misconduct. Nothing in
56 this section shall be construed to create any private action on behalf

1 of a student other than to seek injunctive relief allowing the publica-
2 tion of the speech in question.

3 § 2. This act shall take effect immediately.