



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

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BRIAN KAVANAGH February 25, 2021

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Sponsor Joint Resolution Proclaiming February 26th as Student Press Freedom Day in New York State

(NEW YORK, NY) – State Senator Brian Kavanagh (D-Manhattan and Brooklyn) and Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (D-Binghamton) reintroduced legislation that supports increased rights and protections for student reporters. The Student Journalist Free Speech Act ([A4402/S2958](#)), which the legislators also introduced in last year’s session, will provide student journalists with editorial control of the content of student newspapers at public high schools, while at the same time continuing long standing ethical standards that encourage responsible journalism.

Currently in New York State, school administrators have the final say regarding what students can publish in school newspapers, which permits them to censor legitimate news reporting and expressions of opinion. The bill would give students broad control, while still protecting schools and preserving journalistic standards by exempting speech that is libelous, invades someone’s privacy, or incites students to commit an unlawful act, violate school policies, or materially and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of the school.

By increasing protections for student journalistic expression, the bill would encourage independence and initiative, and foster a greater sense of civic engagement--and would make students’ work on school newspapers better training for journalistic endeavors beyond high school.

“I have always been a strong proponent of free speech and an independent press, said Senator Kavanagh. “Our legislation seeks to give student journalists many of the same rights and freedoms enjoyed by their professional counterparts. We’ve had many opportunities as a nation to witness the inherent dangers that accompany efforts to stifle free speech. This bill seeks to empower our student journalists -- many of whom will become the future custodians of our Fourth Estate -- by allowing them to speak freely and act responsibly.”

“American democracy was built on a free press. The last few years have certainly given a renewed appreciation for the role journalists play in our society,” said Assemblywoman Lupardo. “If we want to preserve a strong Fourth Estate in New York and across the country, we need to make sure students have the same rights and protections as those afforded to professionals. The Student Journalist Free Speech Act would afford student reporters the freedom to cover stories in and around their schools without fear of censorship. In the process, they will learn to navigate the responsibilities and ethical decisions faced by journalists every day.”

Senator Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Lupardo also sponsored a joint resolution in the New York State Legislature proclaiming February 26, 2021 as Student Press Freedom Day in New York State. The day is recognized nationally by the Student Press Law Center and is part of an effort to secure more rights for student journalists across the country. The resolution received unanimous support in both houses.

The Student Journalist Free Speech Act was inspired by the student advocacy group [New Voices](#). Currently 13 states have enacted a form of this legislation.

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