

RCW 28B.10.037 Student expression in school-sponsored media.

(1) Students at institutions of higher education have the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press in school-sponsored media, whether or not the media are supported financially by the school or by use of school facilities, or are produced in conjunction with a class. All school-sponsored media produced primarily by students at an institution of higher education are public forums for expression by the student journalists and student editors at the particular institution. Student media, whether school-sponsored or nonschool sponsored, are not subject to mandatory prior review by school officials.

(2) Student editors of school-sponsored media are responsible for determining the news, opinion, feature, and advertising content of the media. This subsection does not prevent a student media adviser from teaching professional standards of English and journalism to the student journalists. A student media adviser may not be terminated, transferred, removed, or otherwise disciplined for refusing to suppress the protected free expression rights of student journalists.

(3) Nothing in this section may be interpreted to authorize expression by students that:

- (a) Is libelous or slanderous;
- (b) Constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;
- (c) Violates the federal communications act or any rule or regulation of the federal communications commission; or
- (d) So incites students as to create a clear and present danger of:

- (i) The commission of unlawful acts on school premises;
- (ii) The violation of lawful school regulations, policies, or procedures; or

(iii) The material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school. A school official must base a forecast of material and substantial disruption on specific facts, including past experience in the school and current events influencing student behavior, and not on undifferentiated fear or apprehension.

(4) Any student enrolled in an institution of higher education may commence a civil action to obtain appropriate injunctive and declaratory relief as determined by a court for a violation of subsection (1) of this section by the institution of higher education. Upon a motion, a court may award reasonable attorneys' fees to a prevailing plaintiff in a civil action brought under this section.

(5) Expression made by students in school-sponsored media is not the expression of school policy. Neither a school official nor the governing board of any institution of higher education may be held responsible in any civil or criminal action for any expression made or published by students in school-sponsored media unless school officials or the governing board have interfered with or altered the content of the student expression.

(6) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "School-sponsored media" means any matter that is prepared, substantially written, published, or broadcast by student journalists, that is distributed or generally made available, either free of charge or for a fee, to members of the student body, and that is prepared under the direction of a student media adviser. "School-sponsored media" does not include media that is intended for distribution or transmission solely in the classrooms in which they are produced.

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

(c) "Student media adviser" means a person who is employed, appointed, or designated by the school to supervise, or provide instruction relating to, school-sponsored media. [2018 c 125 s 3.]

Finding—Intent—2018 c 125: See note following RCW 28A.600.027.