



FIRE

Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

**IMPACT REPORT
2022**

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Mary Hall-Rayford, a longtime resident of Eastpointe, Michigan, was frustrated with her mayor, and wanted to express these feelings at a city council meeting. When the meeting opened for public comments, Hall-Rayford stepped up to the podium and began making her remarks. Abruptly, she was cut off — by the mayor, who repeatedly talked over her, and threatened to end the meeting if she continued. The mayor went on to shout down two other Eastpointe residents who brought similar concerns.

Unfortunately, the residents of Eastpointe are not alone; Far too many public officials in America are willing to trample the free speech rights of those they're supposed to serve. That's why, this year, FIRE took the steps necessary to ensure that individuals like Mary aren't left without an advocate. Against a backdrop of increasing hostility to free speech, we took our work beyond campus, transforming into the Foundation for Individual Rights *and Expression*. Now, we're taking up the mantle as the nation's premier defender of free speech for *all* Americans.

This report details the success of that expansion to-date, reviewing how it has strengthened our existing campus work, opened new avenues for our First Amendment advocacy, and inaugurated a massive effort to build a movement in support of free expression. None of this success would be possible without the generous support of our donors, and we remain extremely grateful for all that you have enabled us to do.

DEFENDING CAMPUS RIGHTS

- **Through our defense advocacy, litigation, and policy reform work, FIRE secured 96 victories affecting over 2.1 million students.**
- **FIRE’s Campus Rights Advocacy program continued to provide vital assistance to students, professors, and campus groups whose civil liberties were violated.** In 2022, our team reviewed nearly 1,400 cases. Among cases requiring our direct intervention, we secured 69 victories. This brings Campus Rights Advocacy’s overall record to 549 victories at 315 unique colleges and universities. Some of this year’s victories were on behalf of:
 - [Ilya Shapiro](#), who was suspended and placed under investigation by Georgetown University after posting tweets some found offensive.
 - [Ash Mikkelson](#), a student at the Kansas City Art Institute who was expelled for retweeting sexual art.
 - [Daniel Brezina](#), a law student at American University who was placed under investigation for harassment and discrimination for sharing his views about abortion in a student group chat.
- **FIRE’s Policy Reform team won 46 policy change victories at 23 campuses across the country.** These victories include updates to: an expressive activities policy at the University of Illinois, several policies at the University of New Orleans, and a civility policy at Johns Hopkins University. In addition, the team worked with the University of North Carolina Asheville, which joined our list of “[green light](#)” institutions, schools that do not maintain any restrictive speech codes. Thanks to FIRE, 14 of the 16 schools in the UNC system earn green light ratings, and there are now 60 green light schools nationwide. This means over one million students attend schools where they can speak freely!

BATTLING IN THE COURTS

- **Our litigation team took its first big steps into off-campus legal work.**
 - [We filed our first expansion lawsuit.](#) We’re [suing](#) the City of Eastpointe, Michigan, and its mayor, Monique Owens, who has repeatedly abused her authority to silence critics during city council meetings. The judge has already signed an order prohibiting Mayor Owens from continuing to suppress criticism while the lawsuit proceeds.
 - In our [second expansion lawsuit](#), we sued the state of New York over a law that unconstitutionally forces website hosts, including social media, to address online speech that someone, somewhere finds humiliating or vilifying.

- We're representing citizen-journalist [Priscilla Villarreal](#) before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Law enforcement in Laredo, Texas, arrested Priscilla for asking a police officer to confirm information she had already received from other sources.
 - We sent demand letters threatening litigation on behalf of [New York residents blocked on Twitter](#) by the New York State Senate's account for criticizing legislation and on behalf of [citizens banned from gathering signatures](#) for a political candidate in a public park.
 - We're defending a [small autistic-led advocacy nonprofit](#) threatened with a bogus defamation lawsuit for criticizing a residential center's use of controversial electric shock devices on its autistic residents.
 - Our litigation team reviewed more than 345 case submissions and issued more than 650 public records requests to evaluate additional off-campus free speech cases and controversies for potential legal intervention.
- Meanwhile, FIRE's campus litigation work continues to grow. **In 2022, we filed six campus lawsuits that have the potential to make a major impact.** Among others, we're defending [Stuart Reges](#), a professor facing a harassment investigation for refusing to use a university-sanctioned indigenous "land acknowledgement" on his syllabus, and [Michael Phillips](#), a professor fired for advocating for the removal of Confederate monuments and criticizing his school's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



FIRE plaintiff Stuart Reges

- **FIRE also obtained favorable court rulings or settlements in eight cases.** Notably, we secured a ruling that [stopped enforcement](#) of provisions of Florida's Stop WOKE Act that unconstitutionally chill free expression and mandate faculty censorship on the state's college campuses, with the court calling those provisions governing campus speech "dystopian." We also vindicated the rights of [student journalists](#), enabled students to [post flyers](#) or [start clubs](#) for causes they care about, helped [professors get their jobs back](#), and [secured tens of thousands of dollars](#) in damages.

- The litigation team has also participated as [amicus curiae in 21 cases](#) to strategically influence major First Amendment cases across the nation. Our briefs argued [against speech-chilling “bias response teams”](#) on campus, [defended public employees’ right](#) to speak freely off the clock, pushed back against [book bans](#), [challenged qualified immunity](#), and took on other critical free speech issues.
- Our [Faculty Legal Defense Fund](#), which provides free legal representation to public college faculty, now has more than 50 attorneys from more than 40 different firms in 42 states in its attorney network. We’ve referred 27 professors to the FLDF network this year, including [a professor at Southern Utah University](#) who is suing after he was punished for refusing to use a student’s requested gender-neutral pronouns. The FLDF has secured five victories, including a win for a professor accused of “indoctrinating” students with critical race theory and a professor accused of retaliation after he wrote a Facebook post criticizing fellow professors over their support for critical race theory.

INFLUENCING STATE AND FEDERAL POLICY

- FIRE’s **Legislative Policy Reform team** has been at the forefront of nonpartisan legislative efforts to protect civil liberties on college campuses. Rights-protective bills we’ve supported were signed into law in [Georgia](#), [Indiana](#), [Kentucky](#), [Oklahoma](#), and [Louisiana](#). FIRE also defeated a [Wyoming budget amendment](#) that sought to prohibit the teaching of gender studies and [contested bills](#) that would impose curricular bans on how race and sex can be taught in six other states. Our legislative team has been in high demand, speaking at conferences for the Federalist Society, the National Foundation for Women Legislators, Young Americans for Liberty, and more.
- **Our legislative team continued to fight for due process.** In June, the Biden administration announced its proposed revisions to the Title IX regulations governing campus sexual misconduct proceedings. If implemented, the new guidelines will gut essential free speech and due process rights for college students facing sexual misconduct allegations on campus, rolling back our hard-fought campus due process wins from 2020. Our legislative team submitted [an 89-page comment](#) to the Department of Education objecting to the proposed regulations and continues to work hard to confront the threat.

PRODUCING CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH

- **We continued to grow our research initiatives**, which provide crucial data on the decline of free speech culture, enabling us to combat this concerning trend. We released our [2022-23 College Free Speech Rankings](#), which rank the free speech climates of 208 campuses (up from 159 last year) based on surveys we collected from nearly 45,000 students. Alarming, our survey found that 63% of students fear reputational damage if they speak their minds.
- We released our fifth annual [Spotlight on Campus Due Process report](#), which rates 155 policies at 53 of America's top universities, evaluating whether students are provided with procedural safeguards and fundamental fairness when navigating the campus disciplinary process. The findings are mixed. As [The Wall Street Journal's editorial board](#) put it, the "report shows that Betsy DeVos's [2020 Title IX] reforms improved protections for college students, but Biden is rolling them back." Worse still, a dismal 44 of the 53 universities provide less than half of the elements that FIRE considers critical to a fair procedure.
- We released our [State of the Speech Codes: Michigan](#) and [Free Speech at West Virginia Colleges and Universities: Peril And Promise](#) reports. These reports analyze speech codes on Michigan and West Virginia campuses and recommend tangible steps universities can take to improve the state of free speech on campus.
- Our [Scholars Under Fire Database](#) logged 122 incidents of scholars facing calls for sanction this year.
- We launched our [Free Inquiry Grants program](#), which will support research that advances our understanding of free speech and academic freedom. We accepted 27 applications from scholars at various institutions.



CAMPUS OUTREACH

- FIRE's [Faculty Network](#) continued to provide faculty across the country with the support and resources they need to take action against threats to academic freedom and free expression on campus. Since the beginning of the year, more than 300 people signed up for the Faculty Network newsletter, increasing the size of our network to nearly 3,000. More than 50 faculty members attended our annual Faculty Network Conference, held this year at University of Southern California, which featured panels and remarks from leading free speech scholars and attorneys.
- This year, the [FIRE Student Network \(FSN\)](#) held two conferences that connected and inspired liberty-minded students from across the country.

At the annual FSN Summer Conference in Philadelphia, nearly 100 student attendees learned about the principle of free expression — and how to defend it — from FIRE staff, leading free speech experts, and each other. The FSN also hosted a regional conference in Washington, D.C., on student journalism, where attendees explored how to maintain a free and open press on campus.



- The FIRE Student Network welcomed 10 undergraduates to our [Summer Internship Program](#). Our interns got hands-on experience defending free speech. Among other projects, they conducted original research on incidents of censorship, produced content for our [Learn with FIRE](#) online course database, and helped plan and facilitate the FIRE Student Network's annual summer conference.
- Two FIRE Student Network initiatives, our [Student Defenders](#) due process program and [Let's Talk](#) civil discourse initiative, continue to grow. This year, students at 13 schools accessed our materials to support their Student Defenders groups, and students started new groups at University of Wisconsin - Madison and Claremont McKenna College. Students at eight schools used our Let's Talk materials, with new groups starting at Emory University Law School, Dartmouth College, and Brown University.

NEW FIRE INITIATIVES

- **In February, we launched the [Student Press Freedom Initiative \(SPFI\)](#),** which provides resources for student journalists, such as a 24/7 legal hotline, an online guide to media law, trainings, and workshops. SPFI has already responded to 87 student journalists seeking assistance on everything from copyright law to incidents of administrative abuse.
- **In October, we launched [Learn with FIRE](#),** an online library of courses covering free speech topics that can be used by students, teachers, and the general public. Current course topics include campus due process, the philosophy of free speech, and the role of free speech in American history. Learn with FIRE launched with a foundation of seven courses, and we plan to add 25 more next year.



BUILDING A MOVEMENT THROUGH PUBLIC AWARENESS

- **We launched our new “[Faces of Free Speech](#)” media campaign,** featuring billboards in 16 major cities across the country — like this one in [Times Square](#) — and prime-time ads on multiple cable networks — like this spot during the [NFL season opener](#).
- **We launched several other high-profile ad campaigns,** including [back-page ads](#) in publications such as Reason and New York Magazine, a [billboard campaign](#) in South Carolina calling attention to speech-chilling legislation, [commercials](#) on Comedy Central, and an ad featuring [Ice-T](#) that ran during the season premiere of “Law & Order: SVU.”
- **FIRE has appeared in over 4,000 news articles in over 1,800 unique publications:** our staff has published articles in [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The Washington Post](#), [Reason](#), [Newsweek](#) and [The Daily Beast](#), among others; and we were mentioned on 72 radio broadcasts, 125 podcasts, and 35 television broadcasts.

- **Our online presence and subscriber base has grown rapidly.** We’ve counted nearly 4.2 million unique visitors to our website, and we gained a record-smashing 193,000 email subscribers to reach a total of more than 224,000. We now boast nearly 200,000 followers on social media, up from just about 100,000 at the start of the year. Our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter profiles have received more than 87 million impressions collectively.
- **In particular, our TikTok following grew explosively, from roughly 1,800 followers to more than 44,000.** Many of our TikTok videos went viral: Our series “Lawyer Up,” which features FIRE’s Legal Director Will Creeley explaining the [basics of free speech](#) law, has received more than half a million views; and our [Eastpointe case video](#) has received more than 1.9 million views.
- **FIRE’s in-house media received increasingly widespread attention.** In 2022, articles on our award-winning [Newsdesk](#) have been read by more than 470,000 people. Our video initiative produced more than 80 videos for our [YouTube channel](#), which boasts more than 22 thousand subscribers and received nearly 3 million views — reaching a total of more than 10 million views. Our “[So to Speak](#)” podcast received more than 137,309 listens.

