



First Amendment FOUNDATION

Protecting Your Right to Know Since 1985

Friends,

It is with great pride that we can report that against the odds, the First Amendment Foundation, both alone and with the support of other free speech groups and some news outlets, managed to push back, derail, or outright defeat most of the bad legislation we prioritized back in January at the outset of the 2024 Legislative Session.



The most important setbacks were inflicted on **HB 757** and **SB 1780**, which would have rewritten Florida's defamation laws, lowering the bar to make it easier for public officials and their rich and powerful friends to sue critics who reported on them in broadcasts, newspapers, blogs, or social media accounts. If passed, the bill would have had a chilling effect on reporting the actions of public officials. It would have impacted not just major news outlets, but also mom-and-pop bloggers and social media users.

It was the second time FAF led efforts to defeat this kind of bill in as many years, but we expect the bill's chief sponsor, Alex Andrade, R-Pensacola, will try again next year with another variation. We stand ready to fight it again.

We want to thank WINK of Ft. Myers, Bill Bunkley of Salem Radio, and WFSX 92.5 of SW Florida for their bill coverage and for giving voice to Conservative broadcasters' concerns. Their audience campaigns led to hundreds of complaints to legislators through emails and phone calls. We also want to single out the efforts of FIRE, Americans for Prosperity, PEN America, the Freedom of the Press Foundation, and the ACLU for opposing this bill. Other organizations like the Better Business Bureau also came out against it. Thanks to all of you for what you do daily to protect our constitutional rights and freedoms.

The end of the defamation bill was not our only high-profile victory. Our **testimony against HB 465** was credited with almost single-handedly stopping this bill before the House. As written, the legislation was an unconstitutional proposal to censor speech on college campuses that the State of Florida does not like by claiming that such speech was "promoting" foreign terrorism. The bill was only heard once in committee.

Other bills, including **SB1120**, which would have allowed current and former members of the National Guard to use "reasonable force" to prevent the Constitutionally protected desecration of an American flag, **HB1605/1607**, which expanded Marsy's Law, and bills that sought to limit speech by prohibiting government workers from using preferred pronouns or names for themselves or coworkers, **HB599/SB1382**, were stalled before they reached the floor.

But that is not all! One of the bills we supported, **HB 117**, concerning the coverage and disclosure of Grand Jury Testimony, was signed into law by the Governor on February 29.

That said, we didn't win every fight.

Among the most egregious constitutionally unsound bills that made it through both Houses were **HB3**, the revamped bill restricting minors from Social Media platforms, and **HB85**, which created a records exemption that prevents the public from knowing who is behind applications for new state banks and financial institutions. Also passed were **HB75** and **SB184**, which were meant to protect First Responders from harassment while working but were written so that they could infringe on individual and press freedoms to record and report on responder efforts. We expect some of these to face constitutional challenges in the weeks and months ahead.

Finally, thank you all for calling/writing to legislators, speaking out against unconstitutional bills, and supporting our cause. We could not have made it through this session without your help. We look forward to fighting for the First Amendment freedoms of Floridians for another forty years.

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