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FAF Opposes new state rules restricting access to the Capitol

The First Amendment Foundation vehemently opposes the implementation of new rules by the Department of Management Services restricting individuals and groups who wish to reserve space in Florida's state Capitol to showcase their organizations and the issues that concern them.

Under the recently released rules, DMS is requiring that events held at the Capitol must "align" with the "mission" of the state. The rules also require organizations seeking to reserve areas to obtain sponsorship by making their requests through specific administration officials or legislative leaders.

Every year, groups promoting awareness of issues like environmental protection or certain life-threatening medical conditions or support for individual business sectors come to the Capitol to set up booths and displays meant to inform or inspire legislators. Protesters also come to the Capitol to speak out on issues ranging from gun control to education policy to – most recently – anti-abortion activists advocating for lawmakers to shrink the current 15-week ban on the procedure.

The First Amendment Foundation sees the new rules by DMS, which has already frozen out groups because they don't have sponsorship, as yet another attempt by state officials to suppress free speech by erecting barriers and obstacles to public participation in the legislative process.

"Requiring that the user's event must align with the agency's

mission is an unlawful content-based restriction on free speech” said First Amendment Foundation Executive Director Bobby Block.

“People have a right of access to their house to make their thoughts and feelings known to lawmakers whether DMS thinks their presence aligns with their ‘mission’ or not,” Block added. “These rules need to be repealed immediately.”

The First Amendment Foundation is a non-profit organization created in 1985 to safeguard free speech, free press, and open government in Florida from being undermined or diluted during changing times. Our purpose is to protect and advance the public’s constitutional right to open government and access to public records for an informed citizenry and strong democracy. Please support our mission with a donation at FloridaFAF.org.

Sincerely yours,

FIRST AMENDMENT FOUNDATION, INC.