



SPEECH FIRST

March 2, 2020

The Honorable Brian P. Kemp
Governor of Georgia
206 Washington Street
State Capitol, Suite 203
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp,

Speech First, a nationwide membership organization that defends students' free speech rights on campus, applauds the efforts of both the Georgia House and Senate to protect students' constitutional rights on campus.

Historically, colleges and universities have been bastions of free speech, fostering discussion and debate about the most important political, social, and economic ideas of each generation. But today, colleges and universities around the country are ceding that prized role in American history, as they seek to shield students from uncomfortable or unpopular ideas. Indeed, universities across the country are failing to protect the free speech rights of their students, leaving some students afraid to speak at all. Speech First has fought back against this chilling trend by challenging "bias response teams," speech codes, and attempts to shut down discourse and debate in the public square—practices and policies that unconstitutionally deter, suppress, and punish speech at universities across the country.

Despite the importance of free speech on college campuses, universities across the country are failing to protect the free speech rights of their students. Some universities limit students' expressive activities to so-called "free speech zones," which on many campuses must be reserved in advance. Others enact speech codes to prevent students from engaging in offensive or unpopular speech in the first place. Unsurprisingly, these policies are taking a toll on students. A 2019 Knight Foundation study¹ found that over two-thirds of college students believe the climate on their campus prevents people from speaking freely.

In addition, this erosion of First Amendment protections is taking its toll on academic diversity in higher education. A poll conducted by College Pulse on behalf of the College Fix² found that in a survey of 1,000 Republican and Republican-leaning college students, nearly three-quarters of them have withheld their political views in class for fear their grades would suffer.

¹ Knight Foundation, College Students Support the First Amendment, but Some Favor Diversity and Inclusion Over Protecting the Extremes of Free Speech, May 13, 2019, kng.ht/31Qsz8w

² Jennifer Kabbany, "Poll: 73 percent of Republican students have withheld political views in class for fear their grades would suffer," College Fix, Sept. 4, 2019, bit.ly/37rR1hP



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Although universities should not need an incentive to protect the most fundamental constitutional rights of their students, the solutions proposed by the Georgia House and Senate contain appropriate, measured solutions that rein in universities who actively stifle student speech on campuses.

On behalf of our members across the country – and particularly, of those in the state of Georgia – we thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Neily". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Nicole Neily
President
Speech First