

Good afternoon and thank you all for taking the time to hear from us today. My name is Emily Hood, and I am a junior at Francis Howell North High School and the Executive Producer of our broadcast news staff.

As an editor, I've learned so much about becoming a leader and the responsibility granted to the media to accurately report on the events of our community.

The trust given to us by our adviser and administration by granting us full First Amendment rights allows student editors to make all decisions surrounding our publications. Now, the idea of a stereotypical teenager having such a responsibility seems scary, but trusting students causes them step up to the task and embrace their role as objective journalists.

For example, after we had a student pass away from a heroin overdose in 2016, our newspaper covered the opioid epidemic, providing life-saving information on where to get help. Despite this subject seeming potentially "inappropriate," our staff was able to open a conversation in a grieving community through our solid reporting.

Conversations and stories like these can only be achieved through the First Amendment privileges like ours. We have the freedom to discuss how to cover topics instead of being told what to do by an adult. This real-world experience has been invaluable to me and is rare in most traditional classrooms.

As I prepare to head to college, the skills I've gained through having press freedom have given me a great advantage as I step into my future field. My ability to discuss, report and think critically about important events has given me a perspective sought after in many college and professional newsrooms.

In a time where the media is constantly scrutinized in the public eye, the importance of creating well-rounded, objective, and ethical journalists is growing everyday. Without the press freedom awarded to schools like mine and Kirkwood, myself and my peers would have never gained the confidence and intelligence to handle complex problems we consider on a daily basis. I hope you will support this bill to help give Missouri students like myself the ability to grow and prosper as future journalists and citizens. Thank you.