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CONTACT: Jas Chana, NCAC Communications Director
jas@ncac.org, 212-807-6222 ext.107

Free Speech Orgs to Virginia School District: Drop Prior Restraint Policy for Student Journalism

Falls Church, VA, 10/12/2016- The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is urging a Virginia high school district to repeal its prior restraint policy for student newspapers.

Falls Church City School District's Policy 9.46 allows school principals to review school newspaper articles prior to publication. In August, NCAC spoke to a Falls Church student journalist who had spoken out against the policy, which she said stifled her reporting freedom. In conversation with NCAC, Kate Karstens, editor-in-chief of *The Lasso*, said her school's editorial control had deterred her from publishing stories on the school's abstinence-only education policy and op-eds on the lack of contraceptives available in the nurse's office. Karstens' efforts against the prior restraint policy follows a movement to protect student press freedom around the country: A dozen states, most recently Maryland and Illinois, have outlawed the practice of prior restraint in local student journalism.

NCAC's letter to the District underlines that the chilling effect the policy has on student press freedoms is counterproductive to a school's pedagogical goals. By needing to anticipate the views of school administrators, student journalists are prevented from writing on important and personally interesting subjects that would allow them to gain valuable and real world-applicable journalism experience. The letter also stresses that by repealing the policy the District will prove its commitment to First Amendment principals and student expression, allowing it to emerge as a "national leader in promoting student journalism."

"By repealing its policy, Falls Church City Public Schools can allow student expression to flourish and set an example for other schools who continue to have similar policies in place," said Josh Zuckerman, NCAC's Youth Free Expression Program Associate.

The letter is signed by the Student Press Law Center, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, the National Council of Teachers of English, American Booksellers for Free Expression, Journalism Education Association, the Association of American Publishers and the Authors Guild.

[READ THE FULL LETTER](#)

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The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is an alliance of 50 national non-profit organizations dedicated to defending freedom of thought, inquiry and expression.

