



# *State of Tennessee*

## **PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 336**

### **SENATE BILL NO. 723**

**By Overbey, Tracy, Bailey, Bowling, Briggs, Crowe, Gresham, Kelsey, Niceley, Stevens,  
Yager**

Substituted for: House Bill No. 538

By Smith, McCormick, Lamberth, Harry Brooks, Mark White, DeBerry, Dunn, Williams, Moody,  
Kane, Coley, Ragan, Rogers, Daniel, Terry, Powers

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, relative to education.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 7, is amended by adding Sections 2 through 9 of this act as a new part.

SECTION 2. This part shall be known and may be cited as the "Campus Free Speech Protection Act."

SECTION 3. The requirements of this part shall apply to every public institution of higher education in this state.

SECTION 4. (a) The general assembly finds and declares that public institutions of higher education in Tennessee are not immune from the sweep of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Article I, Section 19, of the Tennessee Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression.

(b) It is the intent of the general assembly that the public institutions of higher education embrace a commitment to the freedom of speech and expression for all students and all faculty.

(c) It is further the intent of the general assembly that public institutions of higher education, including their faculty, shall not require students or other faculty to adopt or to indicate their adherence to beliefs or orthodoxies on any particular political, philosophical, religious, social, or other such subject, although institutions may require students and faculty to conform their conduct to the requirements of law and policy.

(d) It is further the intent of the general assembly that public institutions of higher education not stifle freedom of speech and expression by implementing vague or overbroad speech codes, establishing free speech zones, imposing unconstitutional prior restraints on speech, or disinviting speakers based on the anticipated reaction or opposition of others to the content of speech.

SECTION 5. As used in this part, unless the context requires otherwise:

(1) "Constitutional time, place, and manner restrictions" means restrictions on the time, place, and manner of free speech that do not violate the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Article I, Section 19 of the Tennessee Constitution that are reasonable, content- and viewpoint-neutral, narrowly tailored to satisfy a significant institutional interest, and leave open ample alternative channels for the communication of the information or message to its intended audience;

(2) "Faculty" or "faculty member" means any person, whether or not the person is compensated by a public institution of higher education, and regardless of political affiliation, who is tasked with providing scholarship, academic research, or teaching. For purposes of this part, the term "faculty" shall include tenured and non-tenured professors, adjunct

professors, visiting professors, lecturers, graduate student instructors, and those in comparable positions, however titled. For purposes of this part, the term "faculty" shall not include persons whose primary responsibilities are administrative or managerial;

(3) "Free speech" means speech, expression, or assemblies protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Article I, Section 19 of the Tennessee Constitution, verbal or written, including, but not limited to, all forms of peaceful assembly, protests, demonstrations, rallies, vigils, marches, public speaking, distribution of printed materials, carrying signs, displays, or circulating petitions. "Free speech" does not include the promotion, sale, or distribution of any product or service;

(4) "Institution" means an institution of public higher education in this state; and

(5) "Student" means:

(A) An individual currently enrolled in a course of study at the institution; and

(B) An organization that is comprised entirely of individuals currently enrolled in a course of study at the institution, that is registered with an institution pursuant to institutional rules.

SECTION 6. (a) The governing body of every institution shall adopt a policy that affirms the following principles of free speech, which are the public policy of this state:

(1) Students have a fundamental constitutional right to free speech;

(2) An institution shall be committed to giving students the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, learn, and discuss any issue, subject to Section 9;

(3) An institution shall be committed to maintaining a campus as a marketplace of ideas for all students and all faculty in which the free exchange of ideas is not to be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the institution's community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, indecent, disagreeable, conservative, liberal, traditional, radical, or wrong-headed;

(4) It is for an institution's individual students and faculty to make judgments about ideas for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress free speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose;

(5) It is not the proper role of an institution to attempt to shield individuals from free speech, including ideas and opinions they find offensive, unwise, immoral, indecent, disagreeable, conservative, liberal, traditional, radical, or wrong-headed;

(6) Although an institution should greatly value civility and mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect shall never be used by an institution as a justification for closing off the discussion of ideas, however offensive, unwise, immoral, indecent, disagreeable, conservative, liberal, traditional, radical, or wrong-headed those ideas may be to some students or faculty;

(7) Although all students and all faculty are free to state their own views about and contest the views expressed on campus, and to state their own views about and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on the institution's campus, they may not substantially obstruct or otherwise substantially interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, an institution has a responsibility to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation and protect that freedom;

(8) An institution shall be committed to providing an atmosphere that is most conducive to speculation, experimentation, and creation by all students and all faculty, who shall always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, and to gain new understanding;

(9) The primary responsibility of faculty is to engage an honest, courageous, and persistent effort to search out and communicate the truth that lies in the areas of their competence;

(10) Although faculty are free in the classroom to discuss subjects within areas of their competence, faculty shall be cautious in expressing personal views in the classroom and shall be careful not to introduce controversial matters that have no relationship to the subject taught, and especially matters in which they have no special competence or training and in which, therefore, faculty's views cannot claim the authority accorded statements they make about subjects within areas of their competence; provided, that no faculty will face adverse employment action for classroom speech, unless it is not reasonably germane to the subject matter of the class as broadly construed, and comprises a substantial portion of classroom instruction;

(11) An institution shall maintain the generally accessible, open, outdoor areas of its campus as traditional public forums for free speech by students;

(12) An institution shall not restrict students' free speech only to particular areas of the campus, sometimes known as "free speech zones" ;

(13) An institution shall not deny student activity fee funding to a student organization based on the viewpoints that the student organization advocates;

(14) An institution shall not establish permitting requirements that prohibit spontaneous outdoor assemblies or outdoor distribution of literature, although an institution may maintain a policy that grants members of the college or university community the right to reserve certain outdoor spaces in advance;

(15) An institution shall not charge students security fees based on the content of their speech, the content of the speech of guest speakers invited by students, or the anticipated reaction or opposition of listeners to speech;

(16) An institution shall allow all students and all faculty to invite guest speakers to campus to engage in free speech regardless of the views of guest speakers; and

(17) An institution shall not disinvite a speaker invited by a student, student organization, or faculty member because the speaker's anticipated speech may be considered offensive, unwise, immoral, indecent, disagreeable, conservative, liberal, traditional, radical, or wrong-headed by students, faculty, administrators, government officials, or members of the public.

(b) The policy adopted pursuant to subsection (a) shall be made available to students and faculty annually through one or more of the following methods:

(1) Published annually in the institution's student handbook and faculty handbook, whether paper or electronic;

(2) Made available to students and faculty by way of a prominent notice on the institution's internet site other than through the electronic publication of the policy in the student handbook and faculty handbook;

(3) Sent annually to students and employees to their institutionally-provided email address; or

(4) Addressed by the institution in orientation programs for new students and new faculty.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to grant students the right to disrupt previously scheduled or reserved activities occurring in a traditional public forum.

SECTION 7. (a) With respect to disciplining students for their speech, expression, or assemblies, an institution shall adopt a policy on "student-on-student harassment" defining the term consistent with and no more expansively than the language contained in subsection (b).

(b) As used in this section, "student-on-student harassment" means unwelcome conduct directed toward a person that is discriminatory on a basis prohibited by federal, state, or local law, and that is so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively bars the victim's access to an educational opportunity or benefit.

SECTION 8. Nothing in this part shall require an institution to fund costs associated with student speech or expression. An institution shall not impose costs on students or student organizations on the basis of the anticipated reaction or opposition to a person's speech by listeners.

SECTION 9. Nothing contained in this part shall be construed as prohibiting an institution from imposing measures that do not violate the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Article I, Section 19 of the Tennessee Constitution such as:

- (1) Constitutional time, place, and manner restrictions;
- (2) Reasonable and viewpoint-neutral restrictions in nonpublic forums;
- (3) Restricting the use of the institution's property to protect the free speech rights of students and faculty and preserve the use of the property for the advancement of the institution's mission;
- (4) Prohibiting or limiting speech, expression, or assemblies that are not protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Article I, Section 19 of the Tennessee Constitution; or
- (5) Content restrictions on speech that are reasonably related to a legitimate pedagogical purpose, such as classroom rules enacted by faculty.

SECTION 10. The governing body of each public institution of higher education in this state is authorized to promulgate rules to effectuate the purposes of this act in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

SECTION 11. For purposes of promulgating rules, this act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it. For all other purposes, this act shall take effect January 1, 2018, the public welfare requiring it.

SENATE BILL NO. 723

PASSED: May 1, 2017

  
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RANDY McNALLY  
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

  
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BETH HARWELL, SPEAKER  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED this 9<sup>th</sup> day of May 2017

  
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BILL HASLAM, GOVERNOR