



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara, Palmesano continue to sponsor 'Student Journalist Free Speech Act' and praise Corning-Painted Post students for initiating the legislation and bringing issue to the attention of the State Legislature (UPDATED, May 1)

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 30, 2019

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In 2017, Palmesano and O'Mara were invited to learn more about "New Voices" from student journalists at the Corning-Painted Post High School. The legislators met with the students, their supervisor Mike Simons, a media and ethics instructor at the high school, and school administrators, and subsequently agreed to introduce and sponsor the legislation that remains before the Legislature this year.

Albany, N.Y., April 30—State Senator Tom O’Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) today joined a group of student journalists from Corning-Painted Post High School to call for the enactment of legislation they have helped sponsor for the past several years called the “Student Journalist Free Speech Act” ([S2297/A3079](#)).

O’Mara, Palmesano and the local students participated in a news conference at the State Capitol as part of Student Press Advocacy Day, where they joined legislative sponsors Senator Brian Kavanaugh (D-New York) and Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (D-Endwell) to call for the Act’s approval.

In a joint statement, O’Mara and Palmesano said, “The role and the responsibility of a free press in American democracy is one of the most timely and serious examinations taking place in our society today. We remain hopeful that the introduction of this legislation will help contribute to the discussion and, especially for aspiring journalists and their instructors and mentors, help heighten their appreciation and understanding of the First Amendment, the working press, and the protection and preservation of this ideal moving forward into the 21st century. We especially praise all of the student journalists at the Corning Painted-Post High School, and their instructor Mike Simons, for bringing this issue to the Legislature’s attention and for their hard work and commitment over the past few years to keep building the ‘New Voices’ movement in New York State. We have appreciated the chance to work with them and to keep fighting for the legislation’s enactment.”

[Watch Senator O’Mara at today’s news conference [HERE](#)]

[UPDATED: View the full April 30 news conference [HERE](#)]

The measure stems from the work of a grassroots movement known as “[New Voices](#),” a campaign initiated by student journalists and their academic supervisors across the nation,

and guided by the Student Law Press Center. The proposed Student Journalism Free Speech Act in New York would expand First Amendment rights for the state's public high school journalists. It would give student journalists editorial control over their publications. Currently in New York State, school administrators have the final say in publication. Fourteen states have enacted legislation to protect journalists at public and private high schools and colleges. Eleven other states have legislation pending in 2019.

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Corning-Painted Post School District Superintendent Michael Ginalski said, "In my twenty year administrative career, I have learned that students are the eyes and ears of a school and district and they have powerful stories to tell as a result. As the superintendent, I also want to know what kids think – unguarded. I believe wholeheartedly that bringing the things they see into the open in a responsible manner will only strengthen school communities and, ultimately, schools will operate more effectively. I have learned through the years that students can be really helpful in identifying issues so it's a smart leadership move to provide that opportunity. In the end, I'd much rather see something controversial covered in a school newspaper or yearbook instead of a secret Facebook page where the authors are unknown. Ultimately, this is the students' program. Our team needs to give them the freedom to cover stories through their own eyes."