

Statement to the Judiciary Committee  
By Chris Powell, Managing Editor, Journal Inquirer  
On behalf of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information

**In regard to Raised Bill 1056  
An Act Concerning Students' Right to Free Speech  
Friday, March 6, 2009**

My name is Chris Powell, I live in Manchester, I'm the managing editor of the Journal Inquirer there, and I'm legislative chairman for the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information, which I represent in supporting Raised Bill 1056, "An Act Concerning Students' Right to Free Speech."

Mills High School student Avery Doninger, to whose case this bill responds, was punished by her school not for disrupting the educational process or disrupting anything else there. She was punished for publicizing on the Internet her complaint about school administration and urging others to express that complaint to school administrators in the hope of changing an administration decision.

Doninger may have been right or wrong about that decision. Certainly her language could have been better. But from her own home, not even on school grounds, she engaged in political agitation, political agitation is what she was punished for, and protecting political agitation is the essence of the First Amendment of our national Constitution and the Declaration of Rights of Connecticut's Constitution.

As the Doninger case shows, in practice in Connecticut now school administrators can declare "disruptive" any criticism or political agitation by students and retaliate against them for it. Regardless of whether the courts will consider that unconstitutional, it is terrible and tyrannical public policy, and it should be forbidden. Raised Bill 1056 doesn't go far enough in that direction but it's a start.

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