

**Comments by Klarn DePalma
Vice President/General Manager, WFSB – TV 3**

Joint Judiciary Committee

March 27, 2017

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak briefly on Raised Bill 981.

My name is Klarn DePalma and I am the Vice President and General Manager at WFSB – TV 3 and the Meredith Corporation. I'm here today on behalf of the Connecticut Broadcasters Association, as a Past Chairman, for a group that's been around since 1955 to represent the interests of the television and radio stations in our state.

The proposed bill 981 would protect individuals and organizations that speak, petition the government, and associate with others on matters of public concern from lengthy, expensive litigation, while preserving the ability of people and businesses to file meritorious lawsuits.

Under the proposed bill, a person who is hit with a lawsuit that impedes his or her First Amendment rights can request an expedited hearing, and, if the court finds the claim lacks merit, is entitled to recover attorney's fees and costs. A plaintiff can recover such expenses if a defendant abuses the expedited process.

Approximately 28 states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation along these lines, which are often called "anti-SLAPP laws" (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation). The proposed bill 981 draws from several such laws, including those enacted in California, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

Here's the problem: frivolous lawsuits have become a major hurdle for Connecticut journalists.

In some cases, it's because someone is unhappy they were merely mentioned in a story. In other cases, the lawsuit is an attempt to actually control what we report and how we report it.

And we as the media often feel we have no choice but to defend ourselves no matter how baseless the allegations. In one pending case involving my station, the defense cost has surpassed half a million dollars, and we are not going to pay someone because we reported truthfully on a matter of public concern.

There just isn't a mechanism in place right now to say: this is frivolous and designed to harass us, end it but proposed bill 981 would.

And it's not just us. Broadcasters around the state have faced similar intimidation tactics by pro se and represented parties who hope to chill our reporting by filing baseless lawsuits hoping we'd rather fold than spend money.

We had a case several years ago where every broadcast television station in the state was sued by a man in a Federal prison for simply covering his arrest. He offered to settle each claim with each of the stations he sued for \$500. Some actually paid him rather than defend the suit. We declined and do not believe that shakedown tactics serve the people of Connecticut or the freedom of speech.

I urge this committee to give proposed bill 981 its support.

Thank you.