

Testimony for Public Hearing
Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee
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S.B 340, Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee- An act concerning postsecondary educational institutions; establishing the campus free speech protection act.

Good Morning Chairman Estes and members of the Committee. My name is Victoria Snitsar, and I am a Junior at University of Kansas. I currently serve as the Communications Director for the Kansas Federation of College Republicans, and I also serve in various leadership roles for student groups at KU that promote civic participation at our university and in our communities.

I join you all here today to express my support for S.B 340.. During my time at KU I have personally seen groups that I am involved with have their speech limited on the basis of the content of their speech. Even though we could seek legal retribution on the basis of the First Amendment in Federal Court, the issue could only be raised on the state level under Section 11 of the Kansas Bill of Rights, which address free speech in a way similar to the 1st Amendment's approach. I believe that the passage of S.B 340 is necessary to clarify the rights outlined by the federal and Kansas constitutions and apply them explicitly to public university environments.

I believe the passage of this legislation would also prompt public institutions of higher education across the state to change policies that they have in place which limit freedom of speech for students.

For instance, Wichita State University has a policy that states that if “more than forty (40) people are expected to participate an Event, the Event must be held in one or more of the areas shown on the attached map (hereinafter “the Limited Public Forum”). This “limited public forum” is another way of saying free speech zone, and the proposed bill we are discussing today seeks to eliminate the existence of free speech zones on college campuses across the state.

Public universities should be the preeminent open forums of our society, where students, staff, and faculty can openly challenge each other’s viewpoints and ideologies. I do not believe that all ideas have an equal opportunity to be heard at my campus and at others around the state.

I have seen my classmates be asked to remove a “Trump” bumper sticker from their laptop by a teacher because it was “offensive”, while no one batted an eye at the droves of students in “Feel the Bern” and “Hillary 2016” t-shirts that were

prevalent on campus during the whole 2016 cycle. Stories similar to this are not one off occurrences. They are a reality that many students face on college campuses.

I support the measures that S.B 340 puts in place to protect freedom of speech on our university campuses. If possible, I would also like the committee to consider an amendment to the proposed legislation.

I believe that universities to be required to inform student groups of why their tabling requests, event registrations, and activism projects get denied. That way, students can be assured that they are not being restricted on the basis of the content they wish to promote.

I would like to thank the committee for hearing my testimony. I urge you all to vote in favor of S.B 340 and secure the First Amendment rights of all students at public institutions of higher education across this state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Victoria Snitsar