



**FIRE**

Foundation for Individual  
Rights and Expression

**2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT**

The First  
Amendment is  
NOT a Crime

THANK YOU FOR SPEAKING





# Contents

Message from the President	2
Protecting Public Spaces for Public Voices	3
Demanding the Right to Speak Out	4
Standing Up to Campus Abuse in Court	5
Thwarting Government Overreach	6
Advocating Outside the Courts	7
Confronting Student Censors	8
Lobbying for Liberty	9
Backing it up with Data	10
Flooding the Airwaves	11
Mobilizing a Movement	13
Changing Campus Culture	15
Celebrating FIRE's New Era	17
Financials from FIRE's 2022-23 Fiscal Year	19
Leadership	21

*Photo credits for front cover: Lacy Jessica Photography (upper left), Lasting Memories Photography (lower center), Anthony Collins (remaining).  
Credit for photos on pages one and two: Anthony Collins.*



## Message from the President

This past April, I stood in front of a room of FIRE supporters and allies with a simple reminder of all that free speech offers us: richness, complexity, nuance, awe, candor, authenticity, individuality, and so much more. In looking back on the past year, I can see all of these values represented in the individuals FIRE defended, worked with, and supported. Theirs are the stories of passion, creativity, and resilience that make defending free speech worthwhile — and so incredibly important.

In the following pages, you'll read about those individuals and their stories. You'll see how support from our donors and allies gave small-town residents the chance to stand up to censors; offered aid to silenced faculty members; empowered students, alumni, and individuals; fueled the advocacy and research necessary to confront threats to free speech; and inspired a national conversation about the First Amendment and free expression.

While this report represents a review of FIRE as an organization, it also represents a look at the movement we are building and the new era we have entered — an era in which we work every day to fight for every American's right to free speech.

That fight is growing more challenging, as we face a two-front battle. On one front, we are facing First Amendment violations; on the other, a culture hostile to free speech. When FIRE set out to become the nation's premier free speech organization, we established a strategy to strike at both of these threats.

As you will see, that strategy has enabled us to make incredible progress in just one year. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, FIRE has won dozens of victories, held censors accountable, lobbied to pass rights-protective legislation, produced cutting-edge research, launched massive public awareness campaigns to spread the word about our movement, and rallied our followers to promote free speech.

Together with our donors, we're fighting one of the most important battles in America today and building a free speech culture that will offer our country the chance to thrive and prosper.



## Protecting Public Spaces for Public Voices

Jeff Gray, FIRE plaintiff

Photo credit: Lacy Jessica Photography

Last year, Kevin Gaughen and Dave Kocur went to a public park in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, to collect signatures to get Dave on the ballot in an upcoming election. Soon after they arrived, the director of Dauphin County’s parks and recreation department informed them that all political activity is banned in county parks. Dave and Kevin had no choice but to leave.

Jeff Gray, a U.S. Army veteran, faced a different sort of challenge. After Gray stood outside of the city hall in Blackshear, Georgia, holding a sign that read “God Bless the Homeless Vets,” he was approached by Blackshear’s chief of police, who told him that a city ordinance required Gray to have a permit to “demonstrate.” When Gray refused to leave, police issued him a citation.

At its core, the First Amendment protects our right to peacefully express ourselves in public, ensuring that we can make ourselves heard to our government officials and fellow citizens. But all too often, government officials like those in Dauphin County and Blackshear use their position to bully and silence everyday Americans exercising their clearly protected constitutional rights.

Fortunately, that’s not where the story ends.

Dave, Kevin, and Jeff refused to back down and be silenced, and they worked with FIRE’s litigation team to file suit and hold these officials accountable.

After our suit, Dauphin County agreed to end its unconstitutional ban on political activity in parks and paid \$91,000 in damages and fees to settle the case. Likewise, our challenge in Georgia forced Blackshear to revoke the unconstitutional ordinance police relied on to issue Gray’s citation, pay the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans \$1,791 (a nod to the year the First Amendment was ratified), and commit to training its police officers on citizens’ First Amendment rights.

These are just two examples of FIRE’s litigation work to defend First Amendment rights and challenge government abuse. This past year, FIRE has taken on 17 new legal challenges to protect individuals, advance precedent in key areas of First Amendment law, and provide examples of how everyday Americans can fight back against censorship.

“

**“This victory isn’t just a victory for Dave and me, it’s a victory for everyone in Dauphin County. When the county government wouldn’t back down, FIRE sued on our behalf. It was very reassuring to have FIRE in our corner.”**

– Kevin Gaughen, FIRE plaintiff



Dave Kocur and Kevin Gaughen, FIRE plaintiffs

Photo credit: Timothy Scott Kerns

# Demanding the Right to Speak Out

One of Adam Martinez's children was present at the tragic shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, that killed 19 children and two teachers. Thankfully, his son was physically unharmed. The experience led Martinez to start speaking out about safety in Uvalde's public schools.

At a school board meeting in February, Martinez approached the police chief for Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District to express his concern that the school district recently hired an officer deemed ineligible for rehire by the local sheriff's office. Martinez and the police chief's conversation did not disrupt the proceedings.

Nevertheless, the police chief ordered Martinez to sit down, and when Martinez tried to continue the conversation, the chief ordered him and his family to leave the meeting. The following day, the superintendent notified Martinez that if he set foot on school district property in the next two years, the school district could have him arrested.

That's when FIRE stepped in. We sent a letter demanding the school district lift the suspension and promising that if the



**Adam Martinez**  
Photo credit: Nycole Knox

Uvalde school district failed to do so, we'd file a lawsuit. Sure enough, the district backed down, lifting its ban. Now, not only can Martinez attend school events, but he can also exercise his right to be a voice for his children and the students of the school district.

Our win in Uvalde shows that FIRE doesn't always need to file suit to force censors to back down. Our demand letters show we mean business, and they represent part of our broader litigation strategy.

## >> A Friend of the Court

FIRE's legal team does more than direct litigation. Last fiscal year, we filed 37 *amicus curiae* briefs to comment on critical legal issues and influence precedent in strategic free speech cases nationwide. Highlights of FIRE's *amicus* work last year include our briefs in:

- *Counterman v. Colorado*, which saw a major victory at the Supreme Court when the Court ruled that to convict a speaker for a "true threat," the government must prove that the speaker consciously disregarded a substantial risk that their speech would place another in fear of serious physical harm.
- *Frese v. Formella*, which urged the Supreme Court to finally rid the country of the kinds of speech-chilling criminal libel laws that enabled New Hampshire police to throw Robert Frese in jail simply for insulting a police officer on Facebook.
- *Moms for Liberty v. Brevard Public Schools*, which defended the rights of a parental advocacy group to speak out at school board meetings.



### In the past year, our litigation team defended individuals who were:

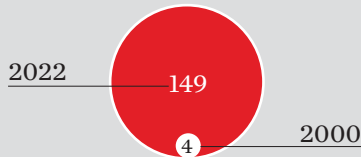
- Censored at city council meetings.
- Targeted by viewpoint-discriminatory dress code policies in the K-12 setting.
- Arrested for engaging in citizen journalism.
- Targeted by bogus defamation claims that aimed to silence them.
- Blocked from discussing the merits of a newly enacted law with their elected representatives on X (formerly Twitter).

Alejandro Flores, Daniel Flores, and Juliette Colunga, FIRE plaintiffs

Photo credit: Alvarez Photography Studio



>> Did you know? As documented by FIRE’s Scholars Under FIRE Database, attempts to punish college and university professors for their speech skyrocketed over the past two decades, from only four in 2000 to 149 in 2022.



Suzanne Jones, FIRE plaintiff and professor at Collin College

Photo credit: JX Studio

# Standing Up to Campus Abuse in Court

In November 2021, Clovis Community College students Alejandro Flores, Daniel Flores, and Juliette Colunga, members of their campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, received permission to post flyers on campus. The flyers criticized communist regimes, and administrators soon received a complaint that the flyers made “several people uncomfortable.”

The college then revoked its approval, claiming the flyers violated its policy banning “inappropriate or offens[ive] language or themes” on flyers, and removed the flyers from the college’s billboard for student clubs. Just a few months later, administrators barred the students from hanging a set of pro-life flyers inside heavily trafficked campus buildings, instead banishing them to a rotting “free speech kiosk” in a desolate part of campus.

**“ We wanted to criticize authoritarian governments, but we had no idea that our own college would try to stop us. I’m glad we fought back, because all students should be able to speak out at college. ”**

– Alejandro Flores, FIRE plaintiff

To confront this clear viewpoint discrimination, FIRE filed suit and soon won a preliminary injunction ordering the school to rescind its unconstitutional speech code. After an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Clovis was once again told to abandon the policy, with the unanimous decision noting that “the First Amendment ‘affords the broadest protection’ to political expression.”

Those protections also extend to faculty members’ ability to speak out about professional issues. When Suzanne Jones, a professor at Collin College, was fired for unionizing faculty and criticizing the college’s plan to return to in-person teaching in the fall of 2020, FIRE took action. Jones, represented by FIRE, sued the college for violating her First Amendment rights. This past year, we secured a settlement in which the college agreed to pay \$375,000 in damages and fees.

Our work on behalf of Alejandro, Daniel, Juliette, and Suzanne is just the tip of the iceberg: This year, we litigated nine campus lawsuits.

# Thwarting Government Overreach

Government abuse doesn't always target individuals. Instead, it often threatens whole forums. That's why FIRE steps up to protect First Amendment principles, wherever they come under siege.

In Florida, that fight centers around academic freedom and the state's politicized policing of speech. Florida's "Stop WOKE Act" prohibits instruction at Florida colleges and universities that favors eight specific concepts related to "race, color, national origin, or sex," simply because these concepts may run counter to government officials' notions of "freedom." This law is full of vague language that leaves professors unsure which lessons are government-approved and which could result in punishment, including termination. But FIRE knows that whenever the government regulates speech, all ideas are endangered.

That's true online too. When New York passed a law requiring social media platforms and other websites to regulate speech — compelling them to adopt the state's definition of hate speech and encouraging them to stifle potentially offensive or controversial speech — FIRE filed a lawsuit representing Eugene Volokh, a well-known First Amendment scholar and blogger, and social media websites Rumble and Locals.

In both of these cases, our legal efforts resulted in resounding victories.

**“ I came to college to have real debates about issues that are important to me — not to have politicians decide which conversations are too controversial for class. It's important to fight back because I came to USF for an education, not government-approved indoctrination. ”**

– Sam Reчек, FIRE plaintiff

Last November, a federal court halted enforcement of the Stop WOKE provisions that FIRE challenged and issued a stirring warning. Quoting George Orwell, the judge wrote, "It should go without saying that '[i]f liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.'" And earlier this year, in halting enforcement of the New York law, the judge noted that it unconstitutionally requires social media networks to disseminate the state's message about the definition of hate speech, "a fraught and heavily debated topic."

Both on and off campus, FIRE's Litigation Program is on the front lines of some of the biggest legal battles implicating the First Amendment today.



**Professor Adriana Novoa and Sam Reчек, FIRE plaintiffs**  
Photo credit: Will Simpson Photography

**Eugene Volokh, FIRE plaintiff**  
Photo credit: Tritton Productions

## Our Litigation Program is on fire (pun intended). In the past year, we:



Won seven favorable court rulings.



Scored two victories through demand letters.



Notched four settlements.



Secured more than \$560,000 in damages and attorneys' fees.



Issued more than 450 public records requests to evaluate cases for potential legal intervention.



Grew our Legal Network to 485 members nationwide.



Reviewed more than 900 cases for potential litigation.



Added 12 new employees to the department — including our new chief counsel, Robert Corn-Revere, one of the nation's foremost First Amendment attorneys.

# Advocating Outside the Courts



**Members of Young Americans for Liberty at Black Hills State University**  
Credit: Young Americans for Liberty at Black Hills State University

When Black Hills State University’s student chapter of Young Americans for Liberty took to the campus sidewalks to recruit and survey students, BHSU’s director of public safety ordered the group’s members to stop speaking to other students because the group hadn’t filled out a form three days in advance. While that is bad enough, this “expressive activity form” contained a problematic provision that gave BHSU the right to “eject any objectionable person or persons from the premises.”

Sound familiar? Whether it’s officials in Pennsylvania silencing ballot drives or campus administrators in South Dakota shutting down student groups, FIRE continues to encounter case after case of abuse like this.

Fortunately, FIRE has the right advocacy tools for the job. In fact, our Campus Rights Advocacy team has been fighting cases like this outside the courts for more than 20 years by engaging in aggressive and creative work aimed at securing justice.

In this case, after FIRE sent a demand letter to BHSU, the school removed that unconstitutional provision. This is just one of our many campus advocacy victories this year.

FIRE attorney Aaron Terr is heading up our new Public Advocacy team.



## » FIRE’s New Public Advocacy Program

FIRE’s campus advocacy gets results. Since 1999, we’ve secured more than 1,000 victories on behalf of students and faculty facing abuse. That’s why we are taking this model and replicating it in the national arena. Our new Public Advocacy department does just that, and is helping FIRE shape our positions on some of today’s biggest free speech issues. So far, that work includes: challenging a Michigan city’s unconstitutional restrictions on public comments at city commission meetings, authoring FIRE’s position statement on free speech and social media, and working with a Florida city to revise its problematic ban on “political” gatherings of more than 10 people on public property.

## A Multi-Pronged Approach

FIRE uses every tool at our disposal to defend free speech on campus. Take our work at Hamline University, where administrators chose not to renew the contract of an adjunct art history professor — simply because students complained when she showed a historically significant image of Islam’s prophet Muhammad in her course. In response, FIRE wrote Hamline’s administration, defended the professor’s academic freedom in the media, rallied supporters to write Hamline’s president, and deployed a mobile billboard (shown below) that circled Hamline’s campus to warn about the dangers of art censorship.





# Confronting Student Censors

Threats to free speech on campus don't only come from administrators: Sometimes, they're led by students. Last year, Stanford University presented one of the clearest examples of that yet.

In March, the Federalist Society at Stanford Law School invited U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Stuart Kyle Duncan to speak on campus. As is far too common today, student protesters who disagreed with his views shouted him down. What's worse, Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tirien Steinbach allowed the hecklers to go on unchallenged for 10 minutes before assuming the podium to ask whether "the juice" is "worth the squeeze" — that is, whether Stanford's commitment to free speech is worth the "pain" caused by Judge Duncan's presence.

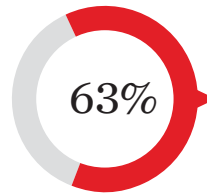
FIRE coordinated an all-out response, writing to Stanford Law's administration and speaking out in the media pressuring Stanford Law to uphold its commitment to free expression and hold the hecklers and Dean Steinbach accountable for their censorial actions. Shortly afterward, Stanford Law Dean Jenny Martinez issued a 10-page statement strongly reaffirming Stanford's commitment to free expression, explaining how the hecklers violated Stanford policy, and promising to improve the culture for open discourse at the school.

FIRE reacts to every campus threat, no matter the responsible party — and our advocacy gets results.

## »» Defeating Trigger Warnings

Last March, Cornell University's student assembly adopted an ill-defined resolution that would require faculty to warn students before teaching "potentially triggering" content. FIRE was on the case immediately, urging Cornell not to implement a policy that would force students and faculty to avoid spontaneous discussion of potentially "triggering" content — an obvious violation of academic freedom.

Thankfully, Cornell's administration strongly rejected the measure, issuing a statement that echoed many of the arguments FIRE made in our letter. This is a win for free speech at Cornell, and it sets a powerful example for other elite schools.



The students at Stanford Law are not alone. In FIRE's survey of more than 55,000 students nationwide, 63% of students said it is acceptable to shout down a speaker to prevent them from being heard on campus.

## It was another big year for FIRE's Campus Rights Advocacy program. The CRA team:



Assessed 1,486 case submissions.



Sent four accreditor complaints and launched six take-action campaigns.



Recorded 72 victories.



Went public with 62% of cases in which we intervened to ratchet up pressure on bad campus actors.



Assisted more than 100 student journalists through our Student Press Freedom Initiative.



Alex Morey, FIRE's director of Campus Rights Advocacy, speaks on "Dan Abrams Live"

# Lobbying for Liberty

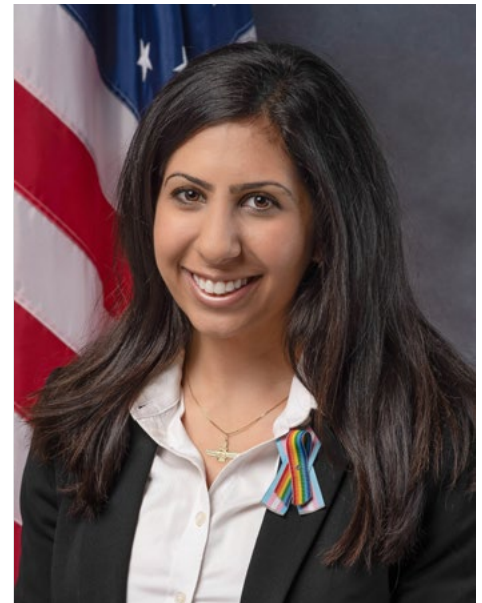
This year, Florida legislators proposed a bill that would have rolled back free speech protections secured in the Supreme Court’s landmark 1964 decision in *New York Times Company v. Sullivan*. The legislation would have had an incredibly chilling impact, widening the range of public commentary that could become subject to a successful defamation lawsuit and determining that speech from anonymous sources would be presumed false.

Fortunately, FIRE’s Legislative and Policy team was on the scene, meeting with legislators across the aisle and testifying before numerous legislative committees, making clear time and again that the legislation posed a threat to freedom of speech and a free press. Due to the tenacious advocacy of FIRE and our allies, both bills stalled and failed to pass.

This is just one example of our Legislative and Policy team’s work. At a time when legislative threats are on the rise, our team is on the ground across the nation to remind representatives of the need to respect and promote individual rights.



In the wake of the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision, lawmakers in South Carolina introduced legislation that would have criminalized talking about places where abortion is lawful. FIRE spoke out against the law, which eventually failed, and launched a billboard campaign reminding South Carolinians that speech about abortion is still free speech. Photo credit: Allen Luke, Illumination Photography.



Credit: [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov)

“ FIRE is the only organization in Florida that is 100% committed to defending our First Amendment rights, and does so in a way that sticks to the facts and to the foundations of our U.S. Constitution. Their constant advocacy led to the successful defeat of a bill that would have had a chilling effect across the nation. I don’t know what we would do without FIRE’s footprint in Florida. ”

– Anna Eskamani, Democratic Florida State Representative

## » Protecting Due Process

In June 2022, the Biden administration announced its proposed revisions to the Title IX regulations governing campus sexual misconduct proceedings. If implemented, the new guidelines will gut essential free speech and due process rights for college students facing sexual misconduct allegations on campus, rolling back our hard-fought campus due process wins from 2020.

In response, FIRE submitted an 89-page comment to the Department of Education. Our message was simple: The federal government cannot require colleges and universities to violate the constitutional rights of students or faculty. As the department finalizes and rolls out the regulations, we’ll use every tool at our disposal, including litigation, to protect student due process and free speech rights.



We won legislative victories in nine states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas, and Washington.

# Backing it up with Data

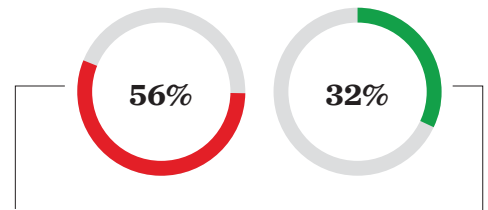
Unfortunately, some remain skeptical about whether America faces a free speech crisis. That’s where FIRE’s Research team comes in, providing crucial data that demonstrates the breadth and depth of today’s threats to expression and arming advocates with the information they need to work for change.

FIRE’s College Free Speech Rankings is a prime example. This year’s rankings score more than 250 of America’s largest and most prestigious colleges based on a survey of more than 55,000 students — making it the largest survey on campus free expression ever conducted. Not only do the rankings give the public a better understanding of student opinions about free expression and their campus climate, but they also put pressure on institutions to work for reform.

For example, after DePauw University came in dead last in our 2021 rankings, it reached out to FIRE to learn how it could improve. Over the next year, DePauw diligently worked with us to resolve every single one of its restrictive speech policies, adopted an official statement committing to freedom of expression, and incorporated free expression discussions into its first-year orientation. Now, we’re working to keep DePauw to its promises and ensure its policy changes are reflected in practice.

With a growing pool of data that can be found in the College Free Speech Rankings, FIRE’s Spotlight Database, and several other reports and databases, FIRE’s Research team is fueling this type of impact nationwide.

## FIRE’s 2024 College Free Speech Rankings revealed some sobering results about the state of campus free speech:



An alarming 56% of students fear damaging their reputation because of someone misunderstanding something they have said or done.

Only 32% of students reported that they would be comfortable publicly expressing their views about a controversial topic in disagreement with a professor.



“The Free Inquiry Grant has been a game-changer in my academic career by enabling me to study bias against certain viewpoints in top academic journals. I hope this research will help other scholars understand and advocate for free speech in the academic publishing world.”

– Steven Zhou, Ph.D. Candidate at George Mason University and Free Inquiry Grant recipient

### The Free Inquiry Grant Program

Given today’s illiberal campus climate, it’s no surprise that scholars who want to study issues related to free expression have a hard time finding funding. That’s why FIRE launched the Free Inquiry Grant Program, which disbursed \$150,000 of funding to seven research projects related to freedom of speech and academic freedom last year. In offering this grant, FIRE is stimulating further inquiry into free speech while helping grow FIRE’s reputation among scholars and researchers.

Photo Courtesy of Steven Zhou

## Promoting Speech-Friendly Campus Policy

Number of red light schools:



Number of green light schools:



With our Spotlight Database, we have recorded a dramatic decrease in “red light” schools (which have at least one policy that clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech) and a dramatic increase in “green light” schools (which maintain no policies that seriously imperil free speech).

# Flooding the Airwaves



Direct advocacy and cutting-edge research are critical tools, but if we want to change the culture, we need to build a new free speech movement. The first step toward achieving that goal is raising awareness, which is why FIRE substantially stepped up our marketing efforts this year.

Through powerful stories of individuals whose lives have been touched by free speech, efforts to saturate the ad markets of specific cities, and creative campaigns focused on key partners such as musicians and comedians, FIRE is flooding the airwaves to establish our name as the nation's premier free speech organization and recruit Americans to join our cause.

Our campaigns are paying off. Interest in FIRE's work skyrocketed this year, and we saw massive, unprecedented increases in subscribers, followers, website visitors, and media attention.

*One of our ads features musician, actor, and producer Ice-T speaking about the importance of protecting free speech and his battles with music censorship.*



*FIRE ran an ad during the NFL season's opening game featuring former NFL player and U.S. Army Green Beret Nate Boyer. Boyer spoke about standing up for Colin Kaepernick's right to take a knee during the national anthem, despite his disagreement with Kaepernick's opinion.*



*One of our highest-performing ads features Keshia Thomas, an African American woman who joined a counter-protest against the Ku Klux Klan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1996. She witnessed firsthand the violent rage of a mob that had cornered a lone Klansman. Amid the chaos, Keshia chose to act with bravery and humanity, throwing herself on top of the man to shield him from the crowd's fury. Her testimony reminds us that violence does not change hearts and minds — only speech can do that.*

**“ We don't have to like what we hear, but we all have the right to express ourselves. Silencing artists doesn't make our society any better or safer. ”**

– Ice-T, musician, actor, and producer

*Credit for FIRE ad stills: Longwell Partners*



### FIRE Goes Viral

FIRE is experimenting with more creative social media content than ever before, and some of it has gone viral. For example, our “lawyer reacts” videos, which feature FIRE attorneys watching footage of free speech violations and breaking down what’s happening in real time, have racked up hundreds of thousands of views. And our video about our lawsuit against a mayor who censored her own constituents received nearly two million views. In total, our social media content received more than 130 million views and impressions this past year.

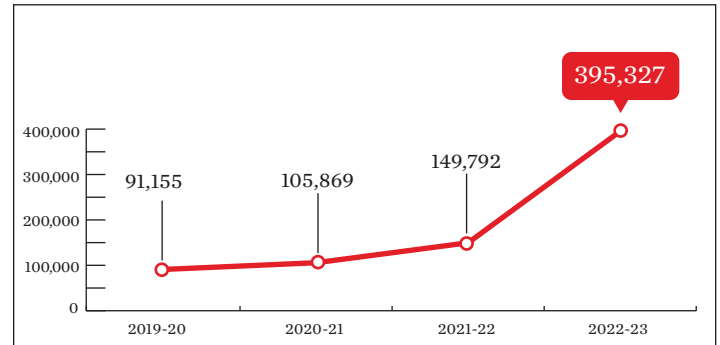


### >> FIRE in the Media

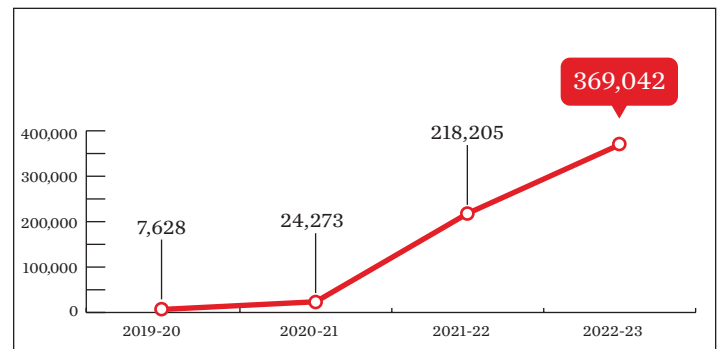
This year, we’re attracting more attention than ever before, amassing more than double the number of media mentions we received the previous year. FIRE staffers and FIRE Fellows published pieces in The Wall Street Journal, TIME, the New York Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the Detroit News, among other well-known outlets.

2019-20	3,799
2020-21	2,989
2021-22	3,276
2022-23	<b>7,650</b>

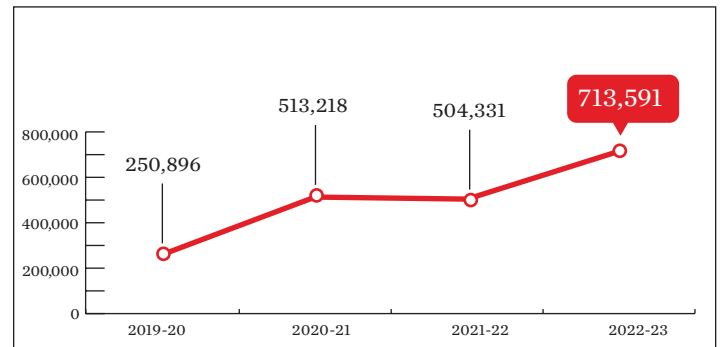
### FIRE’s social media followers:



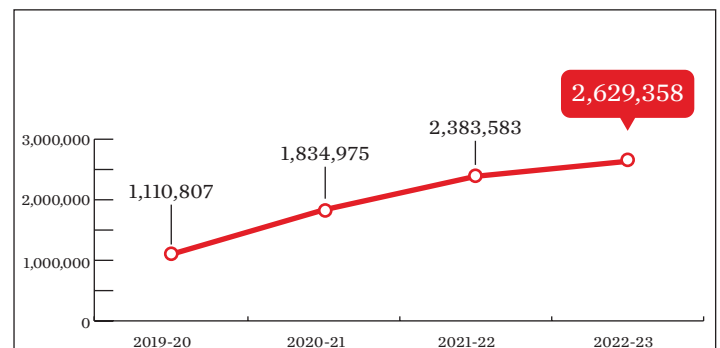
### FIRE’s email subscribers:

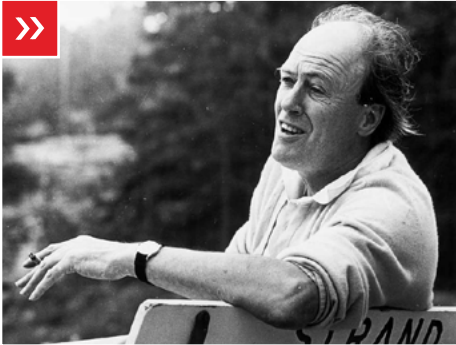


### Views new posts on FIRE’s Newsdesk received:



### Visitors to FIRE’s website:





Author Roald Dahl

## Standing Up to “Sensitivity” Edits

One disturbing anti-free speech trend is the desire to scrub art created in the past of any content that today’s readers might find offensive. This is precisely what Puffin Books set out to do with several of author Roald Dahl’s classic children’s books. Among other edits, Puffin rewrote gendered phrases like the “Cloud-Men” as “Cloud-People” in Dahl’s “James and the Giant Peach” and “ladies and gentlemen” as “folks” in Dahl’s “The Twits.”

Of course, such “sensitivity” edits blunt Dahl’s colorful writing and prevent children from fully engaging with the sensibilities of the past. Even if some of those sensibilities look outdated or offensive today, we still may have something to learn from them. But not if censorship wins.

FIRE’s Engagement and Mobilization team launched an email-writing campaign that rallied nearly 1,700 people to remind Puffin Books of the unfortunate drawbacks of its edits. Ultimately, Puffin decided to preserve the original editions of Dahl’s classic works. We are proud to have been part of the chorus of voices that called for it to do so.

*Image credit: “Roald Dahl” by Queenie & the Dew is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.*

# Mobilizing a Movement

Growing our public profile is only the first step toward vindicating free speech in the court of public opinion. To win decisively, we must mobilize a movement of liberty lovers who will take direct action in defense of free speech.

This year, we founded our Engagement and Mobilization team to do just that. This team provides opportunities for FIRE supporters to challenge illiberalism and promote free speech through crafting petitions and open letters, aiding in the formation of pro-free speech groups within various institutions, calling on sympathetic public figures to mobilize their followers, organizing events, and more.

This program aims to be the “home base” of America’s free speech advocates, giving them the community, the knowledge, and the resources they need to promote a culture of free expression. And it’s already seeing big results — Engagement and Mobilization has recruited more than 26,000 advocates for its campaigns.



## » Challenging Mandated “Decency” in Franklin, Tennessee

Earlier this year, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen in Franklin, Tennessee, proposed a “Community Decency Policy” that would have unconstitutionally banned conduct that “does not align with generally accepted community standards of behavior.”

Realizing this policy was ripe for abuse, FIRE’s Engagement and Mobilization team sprang into action, making it easy for friends of free expression to contact the board through a take-action campaign. Hundreds of advocates in Franklin and across the nation wrote the board, urging its members to vote against the policy. The board listened, unanimously withdrawing the policy.

## » Alumni Fight for Free Speech

American universities routinely rely on their graduates for everything from word-of-mouth endorsements to checks that pad the endowment. Because of this, campus administrators can be particularly responsive to alumni influence. That's why FIRE works to mobilize pro-free speech alumni to push for reform at their alma maters. This year, these efforts led to extraordinary results at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

First, MIT alumnus Daryl Morey, president of the Philadelphia 76ers and ardent FIRE supporter, took to the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* to warn his alma mater that if it fails to recommit to the spirit of free expression, it may lose its culture of innovation and creative risk-taking.

Meanwhile, with assistance from FIRE, alumni formed the MIT Free Speech Alliance, which boasts more than 1,000 members. The alliance was crucial in encouraging MIT to adopt its official "Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom," through which it expressed a strong commitment to the principles of free speech, free inquiry, and open debate.



## » Pushing Back Against Censorship in the Birthplace of Liberty

This spring, Philadelphia's Museum of the American Revolution came under heavy pressure from activist groups, dozens of museum staffers, and even a group of state legislators to cancel an event organized by the parental rights group, Moms for Liberty.

In response, FIRE launched a take-action campaign, calling on our supporters to act as a counterweight by encouraging the museum to resist the barrage of censorship demands and stand proudly behind its mission of "ensuring that the promise of the American Revolution endures." More than 1,200 of our supporters emailed the museum to do exactly that, and in the end, the museum resisted pressure to cancel the Moms for Liberty event.

Image credit: Frances 84 28, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



*Photo courtesy of Daryl Morey*

**“ If MIT faculty, who are at the cutting edge of science and technology, can't count on their employer to defend open inquiry, it might prevent them from taking innovative risks. This, in turn, would stymie technological progress and the education of the next generation of innovators. ”**

*– Daryl Morey, MIT alumnus and president of the Philadelphia 76ers*

**FIRE's alumni work exploded this past year.**



FIRE's Alumni Network grew from less than 2,000 members to more than 5,000.



We helped establish 12 pro-free speech alumni groups.

# Changing Campus Culture

America's college campuses are ground zero for today's free speech crisis, and FIRE continues to build a movement of students and faculty who are standing up for expressive rights in academia.

Take FIRE's new Campus Scholars program, which provides students with guidance and resources to execute a pro-free speech project on their campus. Cole Daigneault, a student at the University of Washington, was frustrated that UW was the lowest-ranking public institution in last year's College Free Speech Rankings, so he applied to be a Campus Scholar. With help from the program, he hosted a mini-conference, "Free Speech Matters," which brought popular podcaster Katie Herzog and FIRE staffers to campus to discuss all things free speech.

By working with individuals like Cole, FIRE's Student Network and Faculty Network are educating, empowering, and inspiring free speech advocates, while connecting them with vital resources — and each other.

**“ The atmosphere inside the conference space was so different from what I had grown accustomed to on campus. During the panel and discussion periods, it was clear that not everyone in the room shared ideas or values. But those areas of disagreement became gateways of insight and understanding rather than walls of conflict and resentment. It was a breath of fresh air.”**

– Cole Daigneault, FIRE Campus Scholar, spring 2023

**“ After interning at FIRE, I feel better equipped as a student and citizen to advocate for individuals' right to free speech and free thought. The attention and energy that goes into this internship program was felt daily by the inclusive and welcoming work culture everyone at FIRE creates. I am so lucky to have learned amidst such talented and passionate individuals.”**

– Dyllyn Lasky, College of Wooster, 2023 FIRE intern

Campus Scholar Cole Daigneault and his Huskies for Liberty group promote their mini-conference, "Free Speech Matters," at the University of Washington. Photo courtesy of Cole Daigneault



## The FIRE Student Network by the numbers:

**7,500+**

This year, the FIRE Student Network grew to more than 7,500 members.

**8 — 240 — 150**

In 2023, the FIRE Summer Internship Program welcomed eight undergraduate interns from a pool of 240 applicants hailing from more than 150 campuses.

**12**

FIRE sponsored 12 Campus Scholars throughout the 2022-23 academic year.

**115**

FIRE welcomed 115 attendees to our 2023 FIRE Student Network Summer Conference, the highest turnout ever.



## » FIRE Summer Interns

FIRE's 2023 summer interns spent 10 weeks at our Philadelphia headquarters learning about the principles of free speech and gaining hands-on advocacy experience. This included writing blog posts, producing original research, and helping facilitate the FIRE Student Network's annual summer conference, which attracted more than 100 students from across the country.



FIRE's 2023 summer interns

**“ The skills and knowledge I have gained at FIRE’s office I will use throughout my life and future career. Every day, I was inspired greatly by the dedication and commitment of everyone working at FIRE to their work and the mission. FIRE provided me with a welcoming and inclusive environment that allowed me to learn and grow. ”**

– Vydalia Weatherly, Mercyhurst University, 2023 FIRE intern

## » FIRE-ing up Faculty

FIRE's Faculty Network arms faculty on the front lines with the tools they need to restore a free speech culture in higher education. For example, our 2022 Faculty Conference brought together more than 50 scholars from diverse disciplines for presentations on free speech. That conference was just one event on the network's agenda, which also included six webinars at which hundreds of attendees gathered to learn about and discuss topics of pressing concern.

**“ I made excellent contacts that are leading to actionable items to increase freedom of expression on my campus. Last year’s meeting resulted in a publication with people of like mind and this year also resulted in excellent connections. I love FIRE, I do not know if I would still have my job without FIRE, as I would not have had the tools to defend myself. ”**

– FIRE Faculty Conference attendee

This year, FIRE conducted a national survey of nearly 1,500 faculty at four-year colleges and universities regarding their attitudes on free expression and academic freedom. The findings revealed both glimmers of hope that the tide may be turning against campus illiberalism, and darker signs that free speech remains under siege on campus.

8%

Only 8% of faculty said they do not self-censor in any of the contexts asked about on the survey.

61%

Roughly 3 in 5 faculty (61%) said that “a university professor should be free to express any of their ideas or convictions on any subject.”

11%

Roughly 1 in 10 faculty (11%) reported being disciplined or threatened with discipline because of their teaching.

52%

More than half of faculty (52%) reported worrying about losing their jobs or reputation because of someone misunderstanding something they have said or done, taking something out of context, or posting something from the respondent's past online.

# Celebrating FIRE's New Era



**“I encourage people to make sure that you’re strict about making sure your Constitutional rights are protected and covered.”**

– Killer Mike, Grammy-award winning musician, actor, and businessman



After reviewing our accomplishments of the last year, it’s fitting to close with a look at FIRE’s April gala, which celebrated our new era of advocacy. Held in New York City, the gala brought together more than 500 friends, allies, and free speech luminaries who, in the words of FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff, have relentlessly fought for the “eternally radical idea”: free speech.

The event, emceed by Kmele Foster, host of the popular “Fifth Column” podcast, presented an opportunity to celebrate free speech champions and served as a reminder to keep the spark alive. During the night, we presented Erika and Nicholas Christakis with the first ever Silverglate Award for Championing Free Expression — named after FIRE co-founder Harvey Silverglate, who served as honorary chair for the evening. Renowned free speech advocate Nadine Strossen presented “Faces of FIRE,” a showcase of brave individuals who stood with FIRE to confront censorship. And Grammy-award winning musician, actor, and businessman Killer Mike offered a rousing keynote address.

The energy in the room that evening was palpable — a powerful reminder of the burgeoning strength of our movement and of our success from the past year.

We are confident that this success provides a strong foundation for our new era, and we look forward to all that is to come. Together, we’ll continue to fight for our ultimate vision: an America in which people overwhelmingly believe in the right of others to freely express views different from their own and expect their laws, institutions, and society to embody this belief.

*“When FIRE stood up for my rights, they stood up for all scholars’ rights, and indeed for the principles that have made our nation — and many other nations — free, open, intelligent, and prosperous.”*

– Ilya Shapiro, former Executive Director of Georgetown University’s Center for the Constitution, who stood with FIRE to fight censorship at Georgetown



*“Change doesn’t happen when people just sit idly by. And this is why I’m grateful for FIRE contacting me, and making sure that not just those of us involved in the lawsuit have our rights protected, but people in every community across the nation. [B]ecause of [FIRE], we have a chance just like everyone else, to freely exercise our freedom of speech.”*

– Mary Hall-Rayford, FIRE plaintiff



*“When FIRE stepped in, I knew I had a team that could help me hold Haskell accountable. They were passionate and hardworking, and together we got results that will lead to the future of free speech [for] Haskell journalists.”*

– Jared Nally, FIRE plaintiff



# Financials from FIRE's 2022-23 Fiscal Year

## Revenue

Contributions	\$35,288,838
Investment	\$2,293,432
Other	\$267,707
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$37,849,977</b>

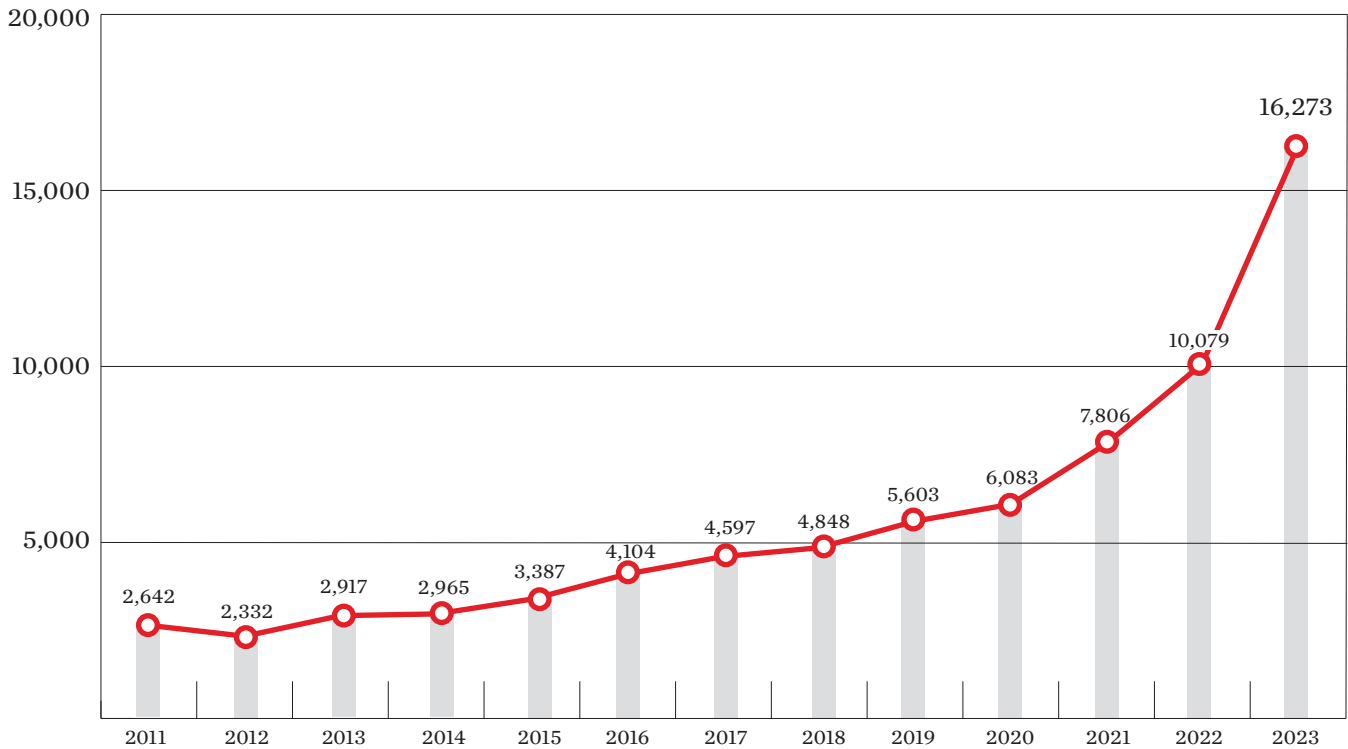
## Expenses

<b>Programs:</b>	<b>\$29,946,088</b>
Campus Rights Advocacy	\$1,522,193
Engagement and Mobilization	\$790,527
Faculty Outreach	\$275,849
Litigation	\$3,274,270
FIRE Student Network	\$785,592
K-12 Outreach	\$75,299
Legislative and Policy	\$870,825
Policy Reform	\$596,647
Public Advocacy	\$256,056
Public Awareness Project	\$17,111,885
Research	\$3,548,738
Strategic Partnerships	\$838,208
<b>Management and General</b>	<b>\$1,482,149</b>
<b>Development</b>	<b>\$3,146,420</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$34,574,657</b>

## Assets and Liabilities

Cash and Equivalents	\$3,680,331
Investments	\$35,515,553
Pledges and Receivables	\$6,349,338
Fixed Assets	\$1,388,636
Other Assets	\$4,165,702
Liabilities	(\$5,948,620)
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$45,150,940</b>

»» Total Donations to FIRE by Fiscal Year

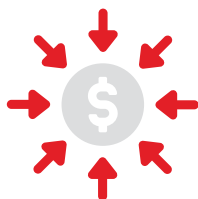


\$35.3 M

Individual donors

Foundation grants

This fiscal year, we raised \$35.3 million: 77% from individual donors and 23% from foundation grants.



5,450 individuals or organizations donated to FIRE for the first time this year.



**FIRE's Membership Program**

This year, FIRE launched a new membership program for those giving \$25 or more, which will help build our foundation of annual support. We've already amassed 9,294 members.

# Leadership

## **PRESIDENT AND CEO**

Greg Lukianoff

## **LEGAL DIRECTOR**

Will Creeley

## **CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER**

Alisha Glennon

## **EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**

Nico Perrino

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

John Ellis, Chairman

Samuel Abrams

John B. Henneman, III

Kurt Jagers

Sandy Leong

Joseph Maline

Virginia Postrel

Harvey A. Silverglate

Keith Whittington

» FIRE’s mission is to defend and sustain the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought — the most essential qualities of liberty. FIRE educates Americans about the importance of these inalienable rights, promotes a culture of respect for these rights, and provides the means to preserve them.

FIRE recognizes that colleges and universities play a vital role in preserving free thought within a free society. To this end, we place a special emphasis on defending the individual rights of students and faculty members on our nation’s campuses, including freedom of speech, freedom of association, due process, legal equality, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience.



FIRE is growing — and fast. This year, we hired 32 new full-time employees to reach a total of 107.



## Feeling “FIRE’d” up? There are lots of ways to get involved.



### Become a Member

Support FIRE with a gift today. For just \$25, you can become a FIRE member and enjoy exclusive perks, including a personalized membership card, invitations to FIRE events and conferences in your area, and a one-year subscription to our FIRE Quarterly magazine.

For those looking to make a bigger investment, you can join FIRE’s Ember Club, a tight circle of our most generous supporters. We honor Ember Club members by inviting them into our inner orbit for exclusive benefits and access to FIRE’s programs and leadership.

Learn more about all the ways you can support free speech at [thefire.org/donate](https://thefire.org/donate).



### Follow FIRE and Take Action

At our website, you can subscribe to FIRE updates to get the latest free speech news in your inbox as it happens! Those updates will include opportunities to take direct action on behalf of freedom of expression.

To learn about other ways to get involved, visit [thefire.org/action](https://thefire.org/action) or email [volunteer@thefire.org](mailto:volunteer@thefire.org).





**FIRE**

Foundation for Individual  
Rights and Expression

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE  
Suite 340  
Washington, DC 20003

215-717-FIRE (3473)  
fire@thefire.org  
thefire.org

Facebook.com/theFIREorg  
Twitter.com/theFIREorg  
YouTube.com/theFIREorg  
Instagram.com/theFIREorg  
tiktok.com/@theFIREorg