

FIRE

Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression

IMPACT REPORT

JUNE 2022



Our 2022 Mid-Year Impact Report comes at a very exciting time for FIRE: On June 6, we announced our transformation into the **Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression**, the first step toward expanding our work off-campus and leveling up to become the nation's premier free speech organization. During just the first few weeks of this new era:

- Our expansion plans were highlighted in a major [POLITICO exclusive](#), and featured in several other leading publications, including [The National Review](#), [Newsweek](#), and [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#).
- We launched our [Faces of Free Speech](#) media campaign, featuring prime time ads on multiple cable news networks and billboards in 15 major cities across the country.
- We put out a call to the American public to join the new fight for free speech, announced our intention to pursue off-campus litigation and opened our door to new plaintiffs, and laid out an ambitious strategy grounded in research, legal advocacy, and mobilization.
- Our social media channels saw a significant increase in followers, our website recorded nearly 250,000 visitors, our email list grew by 20,000 subscribers, we saw our weekly case inquiries more than double, and much more.

All of this was the result of considerable behind-the-scenes work over the last six months, and none of it would have been possible without the generous support of our donors. We look forward to building on this momentum in the months ahead, as we seek to spearhead a new movement to restore free expression as a foundational value in our culture and democracy.


But, even as we geared up for this game-changing moment, we were hard at work defending the fundamental rights of students and faculty, all while cultivating a robust culture of free speech on campus. That campus work will remain central to everything we do as the new FIRE, and we are proud to say that our efforts during the first half of 2022 continued to advance progress. So far this year, FIRE has recorded the following impacts:

- **Through our defense advocacy, litigation, and policy reform work, FIRE has secured 55 victories affecting over 1.1 million students.**
- FIRE's **Campus Rights Advocacy** project (previously the Individual Rights Defense Program) has continued to provide vital assistance to students, professors, and campus groups whose civil liberties were violated. Since January, our team has reviewed over 800 cases, putting 2022 on track to have the highest number of potential cases reviewed to date.

- Among those cases requiring our direct intervention, we've secured 42 victories since January, bringing Campus Rights Advocacy's overall record to 522 victories at 294 unique colleges and universities. Some of this year's case victories were on behalf of:
 - [Ilya Shapiro](#), who was suspended and placed under investigation by Georgetown University after posting tweets some found offensive.
 - A College Republicans student group at [Eckerd College](#) that was denied recognition because the student senate had "problems" with its leader's social media posts.
 - A professor at [Linfield University](#) who was investigated for personal social media posts emphasizing tensions between the English and Business Departments.
- FIRE's **Policy Reform Project** won 12 policy change victories on campuses across the country. These victories included: improved harassment policies at Barnard College, a revised IT acceptable use policy at the University of Illinois Chicago, and the abolishment of a harassment policy at the University of North Carolina Asheville—the school's last speech code—which improved UNC Asheville's FIRE rating to an overall "[green light](#)". Thanks to FIRE, 14 of the 16 schools in the UNC system now earn green light ratings, and there are now 59 green light schools nationwide. **This means over one million students attend schools where they can speak freely, publish op-eds without fear of reprisal, and stand up for causes they care about!**
- Our **Litigation Project** has filed two lawsuits that have the potential to make a huge impact. The first was on behalf of former [Collin College Professor Michael Phillips](#), whose suit challenges the college's unconstitutional policies that led him to be fired for speaking critically about the college with the press, and for requesting (not requiring) that his students wear masks. The second case was filed against [Tarleton State University](#) for ignoring public records requests regarding the school's action to unconstitutionally seize editorial control of the student newspaper.
- FIRE also obtained favorable settlements in four cases, on behalf of:
 - Former Collin College professor Lora Burnett, who [collected \\$70,000 and attorney's fees](#) after she was unlawfully terminated for her protected expression.
 - Haskell Indian Nations University student [Jared Nally](#), who said of his victory, "I hope this case not only protects the next generation of student journalists at Haskell, but empowers individuals at other institutions to realize they have rights and options when it comes to using their voice."



Professor Ilya Shapiro

- [Edward Si](#), a student at Eastern Virginia Medical School whose proposed student group was denied recognition on the basis of viewpoint.
 - [Jennifer Mosher](#), a professor at Marshall University fired for making controversial remarks about former President Trump and COVID-19.
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- Eastern Virginia Medical School student Edward Si
- The Litigation Project has also filed [six amicus curiae briefs](#). FIRE’s brief for [Speech First v. Sands](#), filed before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, helped push back against speech-chilling Bias Response Teams, which are spreading to campuses across the nation. Our brief for [Kennedy v. Bremerton School District](#), filed before the U.S. Supreme Court, helped make it harder for public institutions to punish teachers for protected expression off the clock.
 - Our [Faculty Legal Defense Fund](#), which provides free legal representation to public college faculty, now has more than 50 attorneys from over 40 different firms in its attorney network, covering jurisdictions across approximately 80 percent of the country. The network has secured seven victories so far this year, including a win for a professor at the University of Mississippi accused of “indoctrinating” students with critical race theory, and a professor at Bakersfield College accused of retaliation after he wrote a Facebook post criticizing fellow professors over their support for critical race theory and social justice.
 - FIRE’s **Legislative and Policy Project** has been at the forefront of nonpartisan legislative efforts to protect civil liberties on college campuses. Rights-protective bills we’ve supported have been signed into law in [Georgia](#), [Indiana](#), [Kentucky](#), [Oklahoma](#), and [Louisiana](#). FIRE also defeated a [Wyoming budget amendment](#) that sought to prohibit the teaching of gender studies and [contested bills](#) that would impose curricular bans on how race and sex can be taught in six other states.
 - On June 23, the Biden administration announced its proposed revisions to the Title IX regulations governing campus sexual misconduct proceedings. If implemented, the new guidelines would 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. FIRE has been on [the front lines of the Title IX fight](#) to protect due process and free speech for over a decade, and despite the setback the proposed regulations represent, we are gearing up to continue our fight. We will submit formal objections to the Department of Education in the coming weeks, continue our public advocacy and commentary, and pursue every avenue—including potential litigation—to protect student procedural rights.

- We've grown and expanded our research initiatives, which provide crucial data on the decline of free speech culture. The [Scholars Under Fire Database](#) has logged 50 incidents of scholars facing calls for sanction since January. We also surveyed 208 colleges for our 2022 [Campus Free Speech rankings](#), up from 159 last year. The survey data is in and analysis is underway.
- We launched our [Free Inquiry Grants program](#), which will support research that advances our understanding of free speech and academic freedom. Faculty, graduate students, and postdocs at accredited universities, as well as researchers at independent scholarly institutions like laboratories and think tanks, are eligible to apply.
- FIRE's [Faculty Network](#) continues to provide faculty across the country with the support and resources they need to take action against threats to academic freedom and free expression on campus. Since the beginning of the year, 970 people have signed up for the Faculty Network newsletter, and we've already had 20 proposals for our upcoming 2022 faculty conference.
- The [FIRE Student Network](#) welcomed ten undergraduate interns from a pool of more than 200 applicants hailing from nearly 130 campuses. Our interns will spend their time with us learning about the principles of free expression, the challenges it faces, and how to defend it.
- The FSN hosted a regional conference in Washington, D.C. on student journalism and maintaining a free and open press. Forty students attended, learning from experts and FIRE staff to develop strategies to speak, write, and cover the news freely—backed by a robust understanding of the First Amendment and its protections. The event was co-sponsored by our newest program, the [Student Press Freedom Initiative](#), which provides resources for student journalists, such as a 24/7 legal hotline, an online guide to media law, and trainings and workshops for student journalists.
- Two FIRE Student Network initiatives, our [Student Defenders](#) due process program and [Let's Talk](#) civil discourse initiative, continue to grow. In recent months, 11 new schools accessed our materials to support their Student Defenders groups, and we have helped establish 14 Let's Talk groups since our launch last summer.
- FIRE's **K-12 Outreach Program** (previously our High School Outreach Project) marked key advancements. The Network has over 2,500 subscribers—up over 650 in 2022; our [First Amendment resources for teachers](#) have received over 4,200 views this year; and our staff also presented on free speech, civic engagement, and related topics at 13 conferences.
- We also awarded \$20,000 in scholarships to last year's [Free Speech Essay Contest winners](#), but the benefits of participating were not only financial; 85% of essay contest participants reported having a better understanding of the concept of free speech after participating, while 88% reported that their appreciation for free speech increased after participating.

- FIRE has appeared in over 1,300 news articles in nearly 850 unique publications; our staff has published articles in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Reason*, and *The Daily Beast*, among others; and we have spoken on 18 radio broadcasts, been interviewed on 36 podcasts, and made 20 television appearances.
- We've counted nearly 2.3 million unique visitors to our website.
- As part of our behind-the-scenes preparation for our expanded mission, FIRE has focused on digital marketing and acquisition efforts over the last several months. Our efforts have been tremendously successful. We've added over 30,000 social media followers and over 115,000 email subscribers since this time last year.
- FIRE ran a five-week back-page ad series in *The New York Times Magazine* focused on free speech, which reached their 4.4 million print subscribers. As a result, we saw Sunday traffic to our site grow by 330%.
- In February, we coordinated a [major ad campaign](#) featuring former NBA player Enes Kanter Freedom, which received tens of millions of views on social media, prime time television, and YouTube. The campaign also yielded thousands of new email sign-ups at a cost of \$1.36 per email—compared to an industry average of around \$15.



One of our *New York Times Magazine* ads