



FIRE

Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression



2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

This past April, I spoke at TED in Vancouver. It was my first time on that red circle, which was a pretty surreal and intimidating experience — they literally put you on the spot, with no teleprompters and usually no lectern to stash notes.

Still, despite all the hard (and worthwhile!) work it took to prepare, I really enjoyed the experience. For my talk, I was forced to slow down and remember what free speech is all about — and how to tell that story in a compelling and engaging way. In the midst of a very busy and challenging year, that experience was invigorating.

Why? Because free speech truly is a *wondrous* human invention, enabling so much of what allows for human flourishing.

As you page through this report, I hope you see how FIRE is working to defend and protect that. Whether it's the stories of our plaintiffs, the content of our messaging, or the impact of our education work, FIRE's efforts are a window into many of the things that free speech makes possible: authentic expression, civic engagement, political dialogue, intellectual growth, and yes, even debate over the unpopular or offensive.

But the real potential of free speech is only possible when we defend it without pause or prejudice. This report shows how FIRE strives to do that each and every day, and this past year we celebrated major success in that work: from notching courtroom wins to passing better laws, from producing cutting-edge research to shaping national dialogue, and from reforming our campuses to training the next generation of advocates.

These achievements are only possible because of the community we have built. It's an incredible privilege to work alongside the FIRE team every day to protect our expressive freedoms. And it's an incredible honor to have the support of so many — more than 10,000! — amazing donors who keep this fight going.

To all of you: Thank you for your generosity. Free speech is wonderful, and so is your commitment to it.

With gratitude,

Greg Lukianoff
President and CEO



Greg Lukianoff speaks at SESSION 6 at TED 2025: Humanity Reimagined. April 7-11, 2025, Vancouver, BC. Photo: Jasmina Tomic / TED



“Free speech still matters in America, and I can’t tell you **what a relief it is to have people on my side** standing up for our rights with me.”

— Rebekah Massie, FIRE plaintiff

Rebekah Massie is a mom from Surprise, Arizona, who thought that a city attorney’s pay was too high. So she went to a city council meeting to express this concern, bringing along her 10-year-old daughter to show her the importance of speaking out.

But when Rebekah started talking, the mayor interrupted and told her that the city’s rules prohibit “complaints” about city employees during council meetings. When Rebekah objected, the mayor ordered police to remove her. She was detained and arrested in front of her daughter.

FIRE jumped to Rebekah’s defense and filed a federal lawsuit. After all, if there’s one thing the First Amendment clearly protects, it is the right to criticize government officials. That’s why Rebekah’s case is one of dozens that FIRE took on this year, both in and out of court, against thin-skinned officials attempting to trample our First Amendment rights.

Local Censorship Coast to Coast

As Rebekah's case shows, local officials can be some of the worst censors. To fight this disturbing trend, FIRE took on cases of local censorship all across the country. Examples include:

- Ensuring that Joel Bassoff, a resident of Edison, New Jersey, could wave a flag at a town council meeting.
- Vindicating the right to criticize government officials in Salt Lake City, Utah, after city council members threw out a pro-Palestinian activist under a policy mandating "respectful" discourse and banning "discriminatory language."
- Convincing the City of Metamora, Michigan, to revise a policy that could easily be abused to stifle criticism of town officials.



FIRE plaintiff Lars Jensen with attorney Josh Bleisch

BY THE NUMBERS

FIRE Litigation

Rebekah's case is one example of how our all-star litigation team works to rack up big wins.

12

Litigation cases launched.

15

Litigation victories secured.

30+

Cases maintained, covering issues from online speech to campus rights to expression at national parks.

Public Advocacy

Not every case requires going to court. FIRE's Public Advocacy team defends First Amendment rights through letters and public pressure campaigns, not lawsuits.

17

Victories secured.

56

Letters written to call out government censorship.

7

Take-action campaigns launched — including petitions and email-writing initiatives — to put public pressure on bad actors.

EXPRESSING YOURSELF

A portrait of Kimberly Diei, a Black woman with long, wavy dark hair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a colorful floral patterned top and olive green pants. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

“We all need to speak up when someone tries to take our rights away — *our voice is way too powerful to let anyone shut it down.*” — Kimberly Diei, FIRE plaintiff

When Dr. Kimberly Diei was a pharmacy student at the University of Tennessee, she liked to post about pop culture on social media, making jokes that referenced lyrics by artists like Beyoncé and Cardi B. Unfortunately, the university’s Professional Conduct Committee didn’t think this was appropriate behavior for a pharmacy student. They voted to expel Kimberly for violating the school’s professionalism codes.

That’s when FIRE stepped in. We warned UT that expelling Kimberly would be unconstitutional, which led the dean to reverse the committee’s decision. But we didn’t stop there. We worked with Kimberly to file a lawsuit challenging the College of Pharmacy’s vague professionalism policies and the disciplinary actions against her.

Last year, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled that the First Amendment protected Kimberly’s social media posts. With their backs against the proverbial wall after the Court’s decision, UT settled for \$250,000 in January.

Kimberly’s victory isn’t the only one FIRE secured this year for individuals who were threatened with punishment just for expressing themselves. We secured a victory in challenging a town ordinance on lawn holiday decorations, upheld the rights of students to host drag performances, defended a high schooler who got in trouble for recording a rap song, and more.

FREE SPEECH ONLINE



FIRE brought on board Ari Cohn as our lead counsel for tech policy. Ari is one of the country's leading authorities on the intersection of First Amendment law and new technologies.

Like communications technologies that have come before — from the printing press to the telegraph — online tools offer new opportunities for expression. But those opportunities also open up new avenues for censorship, as Kimberly's case proves.

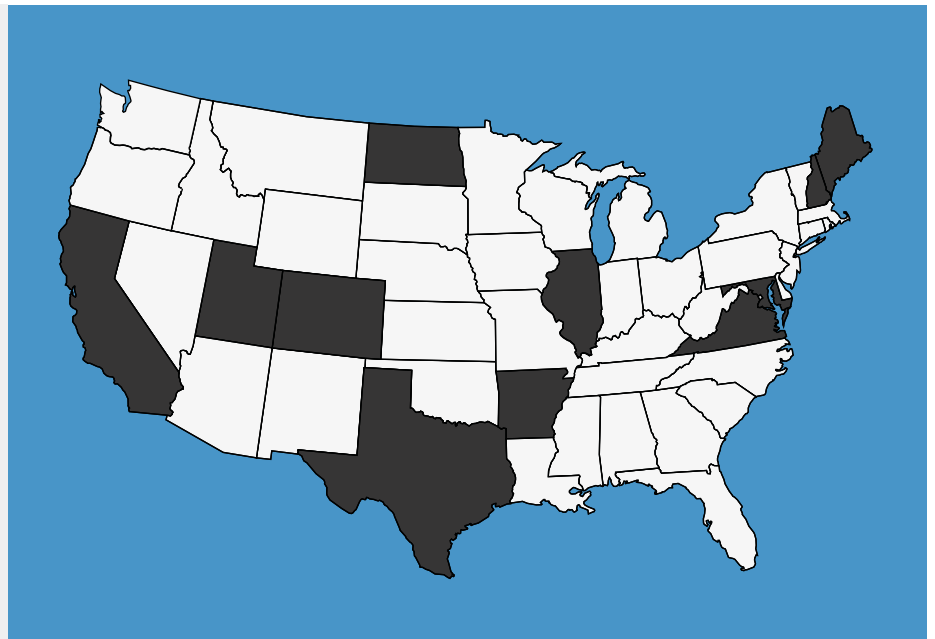
With those challenges growing, FIRE expanded our efforts to fight back and protect expression on emerging tech platforms. We brought on Ari Cohn as our new lead counsel for tech policy, organized a tech working committee, filed *amicus* briefs in key cases, published analysis and commentary, and helped launch a grant program to fund pro-free inquiry artificial intelligence projects. And that's just the beginning.

Happily, those efforts have already started to yield results, especially on the legislative front. For example, in Colorado, legislators proposed a law that would have forced online platforms and social media to permanently ban users for alleged violations of the law or the platform's policies. FIRE aggressively lobbied against this bill, and when Gov. Polis vetoed it, he cited us in his statement.

Meanwhile, in Virginia, FIRE fought a bill that would've banned "altered" and AI-generated images of candidates unless a disclaimer was added — violating the free speech rights of Virginians and making the government into the arbiter of truth. Thankfully, after our advocacy, Gov. Youngkin vetoed the bill.

Legislative Wins

Our victories in Colorado and Virginia are just two examples of how our Legislative and Policy team works nationwide to pass laws that protect free speech and kill bills that violate it. This year, the team secured 20 legislative victories in 11 states, shoring up campus due process rights, defeating restrictions of online expression, and more.



HARD-HITTING REPORTING



Defending the Free Press

Freedom of the press is fundamental for any free society. That's why FIRE took on many cases to defend it this year:

- One of our highest-profile suits was on behalf of Iowa pollster Ann Selzer (left) and *The Des Moines Register* after they were sued by President Trump for alleged “consumer fraud” because they published a poll inaccurately predicting an Iowa win for Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 election.
- FIRE sounded the alarm when officials in Clarksdale, Mississippi, sued *The Clarksdale Press Register* to force the paper to take down an editorial criticizing them. Thanks to our spotlight on the case, the city dropped its lawsuit.
- We defended student journalists at the University of Texas at Dallas after administrators ousted the editor-in-chief of the independent student newspaper in what appeared to be retaliation over the paper's coverage of pro-Palestinian encampment protests.

Priscilla Villarreal is a citizen journalist from Laredo, Texas, who has gained over 200,000 social media followers for her hard-hitting reporting on issues like local crime and government misconduct.

Unfortunately, her work didn't sit well with law enforcement. Desperate to silence her, local officials dug up a statute — never used by local authorities in the law's 23-year history — to arrest Priscilla for asking a police officer to confirm information she had already received from other sources.

So Priscilla teamed up with FIRE on a lawsuit. This year, we took her case to the Supreme Court and won: The Court tossed out a Fifth Circuit ruling and sent the case back for review. But the Fifth Circuit doubled down, shielding the Laredo officials from accountability for turning everyday news reporting into a crime. So we're going to the Supreme Court *again* to vindicate Priscilla's rights.

“My case is not just about me, but also *the rights of every American.*”

— Priscilla Villarreal, FIRE plaintiff



DATA DOESN'T LIE

This year, FIRE continued producing hard data to document America's free speech crisis, so we can educate the public and provide them with tools to take action.

Consider our College Free Speech Rankings. Based on a survey of nearly 70,000 students and a rigorous analysis of administrative practices, FIRE's Rankings are the nation's most comprehensive assessment of how friendly America's campuses are for free speech.

Over the past year, the Rankings shaped the national conversation, notching more than 1,600 media hits — including from major public figures like Senator Ted Cruz, MSNBC host Joe Scarborough, statistician Nate Silver, and activist Bill Ackman. More importantly, schools like Dartmouth College, Vanderbilt University, and Chapman University reformed their policies to improve their rank.

The College Free Speech Rankings are just one of FIRE's research projects. We also produced quarterly national opinion polls about free speech, a survey of faculty on academic freedom, and our new Students Under Fire Database documenting hundreds of incidents in which students were targeted for protected speech.



HOT OFF THE PRESS

FIRE's 2026 Rankings

FIRE's newly-released 2026 College Free Speech Rankings don't paint a pretty picture:

72%

72% of students accept shouting down a speaker "rarely" or more often. The percentage of students saying it is acceptable to shout down a speaker, block entry to a campus speech, or use violence to stop a campus speech all increased since last year and are at record highs.

166

FIRE graded school speech climates on a scale of A-F. 166 of the 257 schools surveyed got an F, while only 11 schools received a speech climate grade of C or higher.

Visit rankings.thefire.org to learn more.

Protecting Political Speech

This year, we fought bad actors across the political spectrum who deemed talking politics a punishable offense, including:

- George Mason University administrators who called the police on a student for criticizing President Trump.
- Michigan public school officials who banned students from wearing sweatshirts criticizing former President Biden.
- Penn State University administrators who removed student newspapers from newsstands over ads for voter registration and Vice President Kamala Harris's campaign.

When Jeff Hunt, a Colorado talk show host and pro-life advocate, visited the Colorado State Senate's public gallery wearing a sweatshirt reading "Pro-Life U," the sergeants-at-arms determined the sweatshirt was a "political statement" prohibited by a gallery rule banning such apparel. Hunt was ordered out of the gallery and told he must remove his sweatshirt if he wanted to re-enter.

If we can't express political beliefs in the very place where politics happen, something has gone terribly wrong. So FIRE attorneys sent a demand letter warning Colorado state officials that their actions violated the Constitution. Following that letter, they rescinded the ban.

Sadly, Jeff's case is not an isolated incident. Maine legislators also attempted to shut down political debate in their statehouse, censuring Rep. Laurel Libby over a Facebook post criticizing a policy allowing transgender individuals to participate in girls' sports. She sued, and FIRE filed an *amicus curiae* brief in her defense, explaining that "penalizing a lawmaker's protected speech in a manner that disenfranchises her constituents is unconstitutional and un-American." Ultimately, the Supreme Court restored Rep. Libby's voting rights.

FIRE's *Amicus* Program

Our brief on behalf of Rep. Libby is just one example of how FIRE's *amicus* program enables us to weigh in on cases that we aren't directly litigating — a critical part of our strategy to shape First Amendment law.

This year, our attorneys filed 37 *amicus* briefs filed in courts nationwide, taking on attempts to regulate online speech, attacks on the First Amendment rights of law firms, threats to campus expression, and much more. We secured 11 victories in cases in which we filed briefs.

"Now, Coloradans are free to share their voices, particularly at the state Capitol."

— Jeff Hunt, FIRE client

PRESERVING A CULTURE OF FREEDOM

To realize the benefits of free speech, we can't just fight cases and make better policies. We have to cultivate a culture that deeply values free expression. That's why this year, FIRE worked to help Americans understand why their expressive rights matter and how to stand up for them.

FIRE in the Media

The news cycle this year was relentless, but FIRE staffers burned the midnight oil to stay on top of every breaking crisis. In a media landscape that rewards partisanship and clickbait, we were the adults in the room: Whether discussing federal threats to free speech, ongoing campus issues, or censorship at the local level, we led the national conversation back to nonpartisan free speech principles and nuanced First Amendment analysis.

FIRE Hits the Road

FIRE also reached new audiences through events. Take the "Freedom Debates," co-hosted with *The Free Press*, which featured leading intellectuals civilly debating some of the hottest topics of the day. And these debates are just the tip of the iceberg. This year, we held 60 events in 21 cities — including New York, San Francisco, Austin, and Washington, D.C. — which attracted more than 7,500 attendees.

BY THE NUMBERS

FIRE's Media Reach

1 Million +

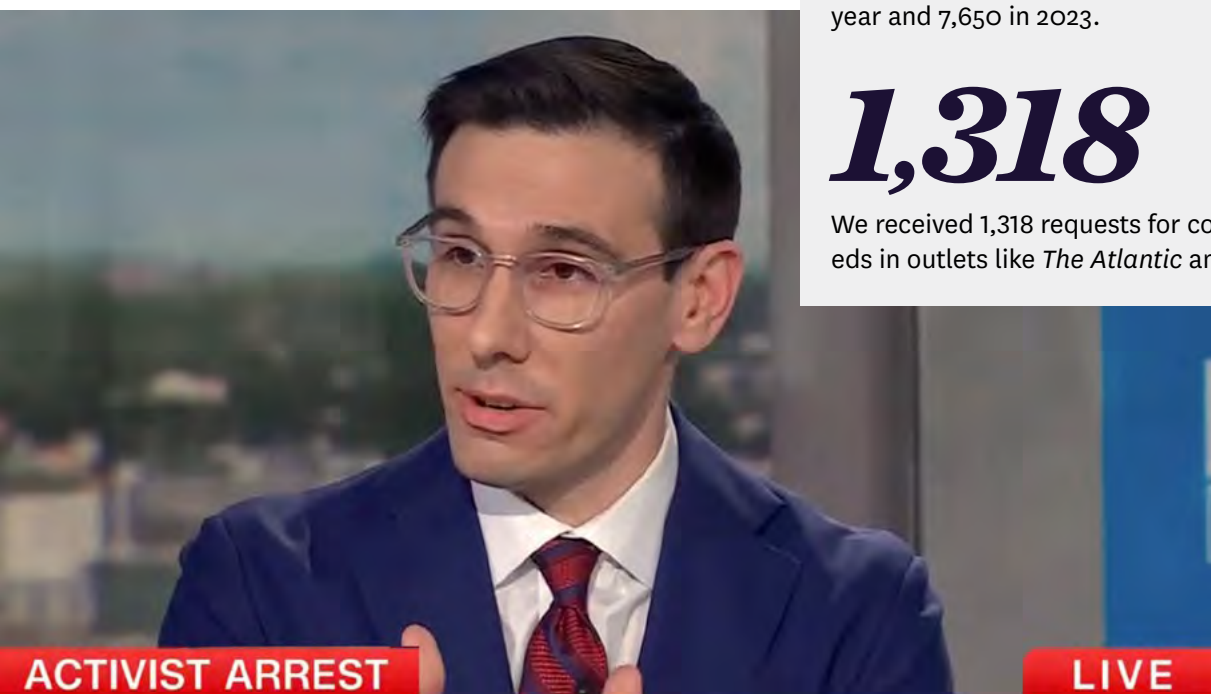
FIRE surpassed the one million mark for combined social media followers and email subscribers. Our social media content received 1.6 million likes, comments, and shares, and our videos received 10.4 million views.

19,089

We notched 19,089 media mentions, up from 15,730 last year and 7,650 in 2023.

1,318

We received 1,318 requests for comment and placed 74 op-eds in outlets like *The Atlantic* and *Reason* magazine.



FIRE Executive Vice President
Nico Perrino appears on CNN.

WHITE HOUSE: KHALIL LED GROUP DISTRIBUTING "HAMAS PROPAGANDA"



“I think there’s something wrong with the culture at Brown, because *people aren’t accepting of any sort of scrutiny whatsoever.*”

— Alex Shieh, student reporter at Brown University



Brown University student journalist Alex Shieh wanted to know what Brown administrators did all day. He also had a sense of humor.

Inspired by the Department of Governmental Efficiency (DOGE), Alex sent an email to 3,805 administrators asking them to “Describe what tasks you performed in the past week.” Two days later, Brown told Alex it was reviewing his email based on allegations that he had “emotionally harmed” several employees.

FIRE intervened on Alex’s behalf, explaining in a letter to Brown that its claims were farcical, and that its handling of the investigation suggested it was retaliating against a student journalist — a stark violation of its free speech commitment. Within weeks, the university found Alex not responsible for all charges.

Alex’s provocations should’ve been welcomed with debate, not enforced silence. His case shows how free speech continues to be under siege on America’s campuses, and this year we took on hundreds of cases defending students and faculty nationwide.

BY THE NUMBERS

Campus Rights Advocacy

1,200+

Case submissions fielded.

150+

Cases actively maintained on our docket.

174

Letters written to administrators warning them against violating expressive rights.

82

Campus victories nationwide.

BAD POLICY MAKES BAD PRACTICE

One of the best ways to ensure that America's college campuses respect freedom of speech is to reform their policies. This year, our Policy Reform team helped improve 43 policies on 29 campuses, impacting more than 630,000 students. And we welcomed four new schools to our roster of "green light" campuses that maintain no policies that seriously imperil free expression: Dartmouth College, Vanderbilt University, the University of Missouri – St. Louis, and the Missouri University of Science and Technology.

For the first time in FIRE's history, there are more green light schools nationwide than "red light" campuses, which have policies that clearly and substantially restrict free speech: 73 green light schools vs. 72 red light schools. In 2006, there were 229 red light schools and just eight green light schools.

Taking Action

Rebecca Bryant Novak (below), a doctoral student at the University of Rochester's music school, was expelled without due process after speaking out about how the school mishandled her harassment complaint against her professor. FIRE mobilized nearly 800 advocates to join us in demanding that the university reinstate her, and this was just one of 12 take-action campaigns FIRE launched on campus this year.



2006

Red light schools
Green light schools



2025



Chart excludes schools earning FIRE's "yellow light" rating.

Defending Students and Faculty

Administrators and government officials on all sides of the political spectrum attacked campus free speech and academic freedom this year. FIRE was there to fight back:

- We made sure that the University of Connecticut School of Medicine didn't impose a mandatory DEI loyalty pledge as part of its Hippocratic Oath.
- We defended students at Davidson College who were charged with harassment for handing out pamphlets criticizing "the pro-Hamas left."
- When international students Mahmoud Khalil and Rümeysa Öztürk were targeted for deportation for protected pro-Palestinian speech, we filed *amicus* briefs in their defense.

EDUCATING FUTURE ADVOCATES

Through internships, legal fellowships, and other programs that reach hundreds of students every year, we're building the bench of the next generation of free speech champions.

Consider Melissa Shane (right). She was frustrated with the chilly climate for speech at Emory University, which led her to intern at FIRE in 2024. Here, she gained hands-on experience in advocating for better free speech policies, which she brought back to Emory. As a member of the university's Open Expression Committee, she authored a report on the university's problematic campus expression policy. Not long after, administrators updated the policy to align with her recommendations.

This year, Melissa joined FIRE's Policy Reform team to continue doing this work full-time.



“I discovered an amazing community where people from opposite sides of the political spectrum came together to defend the First Amendment.”

— Melissa Shane, 2024 FIRE intern



Bringing Civil Discourse to Campus

As a FIRE Campus Scholar in 2024, Mac Mahoney (third from the right) received resources from us to build a public display about the history of free speech on Dartmouth College's campus. This year, he leveled up his work promoting a culture of free expression, becoming president of the Dartmouth Political Union. This group hosts civil discourse events for students and brings speakers, such as scholar Noam Chomsky and former CIA Director John Deutch, to campus to debate contentious political issues.

Free Speech Forum attendees



“I love the free speech environment and being around others who are also interested in civil discourse!” — Free Speech Forum attendee

The Free Speech Forum

In June, FIRE hosted its second annual Free Speech Forum, which brought 200 high school students from across the country to Washington, D.C., for a week of learning about free speech. Students heard from activists, scholars, and FIRE staff; dug into hands-on projects related to journalism, social media, and the arts; and learned how to effectively advocate for free speech.

Tomorrow's First Amendment Attorneys

Thanks to a generous gift from Arthur D. Hellman, a legal scholar at the University of Pittsburgh, each summer FIRE welcomes a cohort of legal fellows who work with us to gain front-line experience in First Amendment litigation. And they go on to make a big impact: This year, former Hellman Fellows landed prestigious clerkships with federal courts and organizations like the Institute for Justice and the Knight Institute.

From left: Seth Moskowitz, University of Chicago Law School; George Valases, George Washington University Law School; Preston Bowden, University of Virginia School of Law; Kasey Pataki, Harvard Law School; Daniel Thompson, Georgetown University Law Center

BY THE NUMBERS

FIRE's Student Programs

30

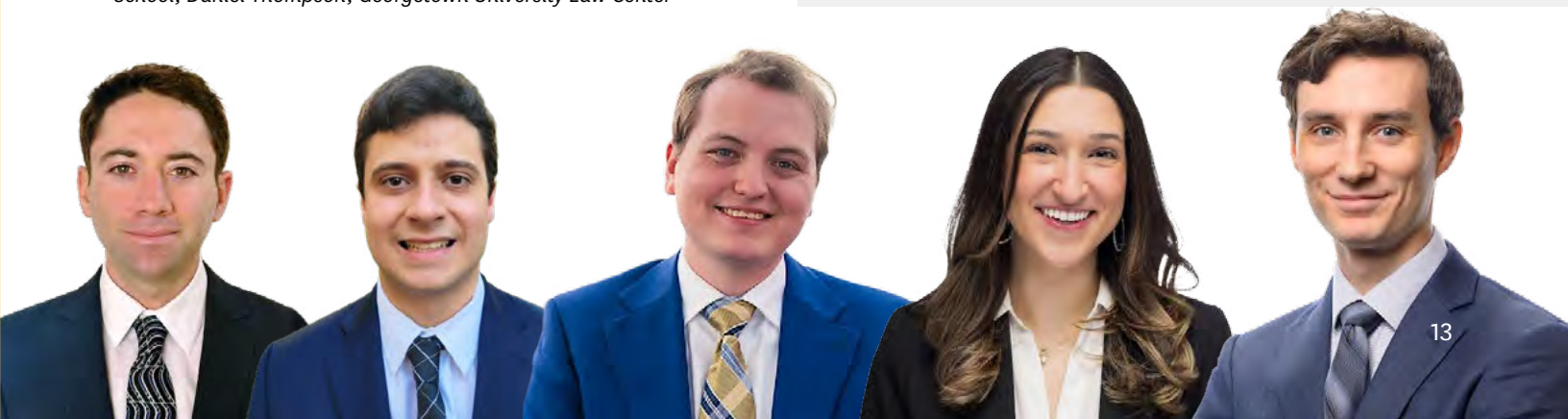
Interns hosted.

13

Legal fellows and clerks hosted.

100+

Undergraduates attended our conference in Philadelphia.



A BANNER YEAR

Protecting free speech isn't easy. It requires defending ideas that many find disagreeable and offensive while standing in the middle of America's most heated cultural and political battles. This year often felt especially daunting: from government overreach to campus censorship to efforts to control online expression, the threats to our expressive rights were relentless.

But despite the challenges, we remain motivated, inspired, and excited by all free speech has to offer: the ability to challenge the abuse of power, have democratic debate, seek truth and knowledge, and authentically express ourselves. In short, free speech is a big part of what makes life worth living.

We're incredibly proud of all we accomplished during this banner year. But none of this would be possible without our amazing donors. You're a crucial part of our team, and we can't wait to see what we accomplish together next year.

From all of us:
Thank you.



FIRE's executive team

Fiscal Year 2025 Donations

36.5M

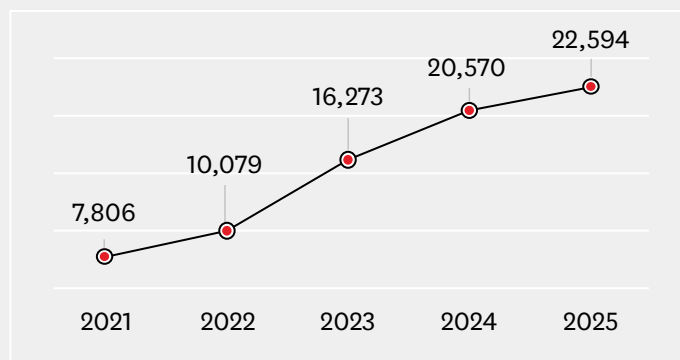
This fiscal year, we raised \$36.5 million: 74% from individual donors and 26% from foundation grants.

2,987

Individuals or organizations donated to FIRE for the first time this year.

10,409

FIRE's membership program consists of those who donate \$25 or more annually. We now have 10,409 members.



Total number of donations to FIRE by fiscal year

Leadership

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Greg Lukianoff

LEGAL DIRECTOR

Will Creeley

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Alisha Glennon

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Nico Perrino

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KEY FINANCIALS

FIRE's 2024 - 2025 Fiscal Year

Support & Revenue	
Contributions and Grants	\$36,482,507
Realized Investment Income	\$2,831,540
Unrealized Investment Income	\$950,827
Other Income	\$607,781
TOTAL	\$40,872,655
Expenses	
Programs	
Campus Rights Advocacy	\$2,636,541
Communications	\$6,343,914
Engagement & Mobilization	\$913,085
Faculty Outreach	\$285,893
Litigation	\$4,144,885
Legislative and Policy	\$1,580,594
Policy Reform	\$840,621
Public Advocacy	\$970,626
Research	\$3,086,892
Strategic Partnerships	\$2,842,796
Management and General	\$2,749,852
Development	\$3,244,941
TOTAL	\$29,640,640
Assets & Liabilities	
Cash and Equivalents	\$6,317,283
Investments	\$50,585,570
Accounts Receivable	\$119,915
Pledges Receivable	\$6,063,026
Property and Equipment	\$4,828,376
Right-of-Use Assets	\$5,262,418
Other Assets	\$921,122
Liabilities	(\$9,637,453)
NET ASSETS	\$64,460,257



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.

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Rights and Expression
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