

ACLU of Wisconsin: Condemns University of Wisconsin policy allowing expulsion of student protesters

Posted on Tuesday, Oct 10, 2017

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact: Molly Collins, ACLU of Wisconsin
[414-272-4032 x 215](tel:414-272-4032)
media@aclu-wi.org

Madison, Wisconsin – The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin today condemned a new policy adopted by the University of Wisconsin that the organization said threatens First Amendment rights by endorsing the suspension and expulsion of student protesters who merely “interfere with the rights of others to engage in or listen to expressive activity.”

“This vague policy leaves it for students attending a lecture to guess whether booing a statement that others applaud or asking a pointed question during a Q&A period will be deemed to ‘interfere’ with those who support the speaker’s views,” said Laurence Dupuis, ACLU of Wisconsin legal director. “And protesters outside a speaker’s venue may legitimately wonder whether an attempt to persuade another student not to attend will be subject to punishment for interfering. That the punishment could include suspension or expulsion makes the cost of guessing wrong so high that many students may self-censor – an unacceptable result in a university community committed to the open and robust debate.”

“Instead of protecting free expression, this new policy will have the opposite effect – threatening the First Amendment rights of students and suppressing constitutionally-protected speech,” said Chris Ott, ACLU of Wisconsin executive

director. “Giving controversial figures the right to speak – which the ACLU supports – does not mean denying students the right to protest them. Rather than restricting free speech, the University of Wisconsin should foster an environment where all voices are heard and competing viewpoints can be aired without fear of punishment or expulsion. The university should repeal this misguided policy, and the ACLU of Wisconsin stands ready to defend any student whose rights are violated by its enforcement.”

The new policy, which was adopted in response to legislation passed by the Wisconsin State Assembly earlier this year and still pending in the Senate, which allows for the suspension and expulsion of students who engage in “disorderly misconduct that materially and substantially disrupted the free expression of others,” appears to go even further than the Assembly’s bill.

This statement is on the website here: <http://aclu-wi.org/-story/aclu-wisconsin-condemns-university-wisconsin-policy-allowing-expulsion-student-protesters>

For more than 90 years, the ACLU has been our nation’s guardian of liberty, working in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone in this country. The ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan, private organization whose 24,000 members support its efforts to defend the civil rights and liberties of all Wisconsin residents, is the Wisconsin Affiliate of the ACLU. For more on the ACLU of Wisconsin, visit our website, like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter at @ACLUofWisconsin and @ACLUMadison.