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I am honored to speak to you today on behalf of the First Amendment Foundation regarding the proposed prohibited expenditures by higher education institutions.

My name is Lauren Buete, and I am the Legislative Director at the First Amendment Foundation, a nonpartisan nonprofit founded more than 40 years ago to safeguard and uphold Florida's open government and public records laws. I want to voice the Foundation's strong opposition to these rules and implore you to reconsider their far-reaching and dangerous implications.

Florida boasts one of the best higher education systems in the country. Our schools produce world-famous scholars, researchers, athletes, performers, and innovators. Our universities prepare for careers, active participation in civil discourse, and the ability to navigate an increasingly polarized society. More importantly, universities provide an invaluable arena for students to engage with ideas that both inspire and challenge them every day.

We believe that these regulations will rob students of the opportunity to explore such ideas and that they will intimidate educators into silence. Although framed as a way to quash the overly progressive nature of student and faculty groups on campuses, it will have an equal effect on conservative and religious groups. The overbreadth of these proposed rules far exceed the requirements of SB266. Their ambiguity casts a chilling shadow over the *entire* university community's participation in public life. It is an egregious affront to identity-based groups like the Black Student Union and religious organizations such as Hillel House. These rules erode student self-governance, undermine the expertise of educators, and prevent even statements of solidarity from University officials. The unclear implications of these rules threaten instruction, research, and discussion on "polarizing or divisive" subjects ranging from gender-specific medicine; to philosophical

discussion on morality and theology; to political debates on democracy vs. autocracy, and communism vs. fascism.

Let us be clear: These rules are directly contrary to the First Amendment and the United States Constitution. They will effectively silence educators and censor both liberal and conservative discourse among some of our brightest citizens. Campuses *must* remain a hub for free speech and open inquiry so that we can continue to foster generations of Floridians who value honest discourse despite varying opinions, and camaraderie despite disagreement.

Our students deserve the right to speak freely, to hear diverse voices, and to gain knowledge without fear of censorship, and our educators are tasked with fostering an environment in which this is possible. We must not succumb to fear but instead embrace the power of dialogue. As President Kennedy once said, "A nation that is afraid to let its people judge truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people." Please preserve our universities as open markets of ideas. Please continue to instill faith in our students, not fear.

Thank you.

The First Amendment Foundation is a non-profit organization created in 1985 to safeguard free speech, free press, and open government in Florida from being undermined or diluted during changing times. Our purpose is to protect and advance the public's constitutional right to open government and access to public records for an informed citizenry and strong democracy. Please support our mission with a donation at FloridaFAF.org