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Carmel High School Senior Testifies at Statehouse Fighting for First Amendment Rights for Student Journalists

Carmel, IN – A Carmel High School senior will testify at the Statehouse tomorrow morning about the importance of First Amendment rights for student journalists. Selena Qian, editor in chief of the topically-based magazine the Acumen and a member of the HiLite newsmagazine staff, was one of ten Indiana students selected by state Rep. Ed Clere, R-New Albany, to help craft House Bill 1130. The bill protects the rights of student journalists by allowing them to operate free of pressure or censorship from school boards, administrators and others.

“Passing the bill says that students are trusted by their schools to be responsible,” Qian says.

“Oftentimes, student journalists aren’t taken seriously. This bill is about being able to publish on the issues we find important without worrying about censorship, especially on controversial subjects.”

Clere’s bill, co-authored by Rep. Ed Delaney, D-Indianapolis, has received a great deal of bipartisan support. If passed, school corporations and state educational institutions would be required to adopt policies that allow for a free student press unless the content is libelous or slanderous.

“When students feel like their voices matters, they take that job seriously, and they take responsibility to do it well,” journalism advisor Jim Streisel says. “Students who have the ability to decide content produce much better content.”

Qian says student journalists at Carmel High School are fortunate in that their administration and advisors understand the value of a strong, responsible student press. Censorship has never been an issue for them. She’s hopeful this bill will provide other student journalists the same protection.

“Bringing in students has, I think, given legislators perspective and will help us during the hearing to show that we would be responsible with the freedom the bill guarantees,” Qian says. “This process has taught me a lot about how our state legislature functions and the nuances of legislative language.”

Qian and Carmel High School principal John Williams are scheduled to testify at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, February 14.