

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Roberta Manter and I live in Fayette. I am asking you to vote in favor of LD 1640.

The First Amendment to the US Constitution says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Our schools should not be exempt from this basic freedom. Yet it has become "politically correct" to only allow certain points of view to be expressed. For example, the general consensus seems to be that it would violate the Constitution to prohibit a student from expressing his Islamic beliefs, yet at the same time it is thought to somehow violate the Constitution to allow a student to express his Christian beliefs.

This bill would allow students of all faiths and political ideologies to freely express their views in an environment of "mutual respect." While unlawful activity is prohibited, no one is to be prohibited from speaking their mind, nor are they to be condemned or belittled for disagreeing with the popular view. During the political campaigns last year, I knew many who were afraid to express their views or even to cite facts due to the outpouring of hatred they would receive in return. Institutes of higher learning are perpetuating this environment by prohibiting freedom of expression. Our society would be much better served by providing a forum where our young adults can learn to allow or accept the expression of differing views, even if they do not embrace them.

Schools are supposed to prepare students for the real world. The real world is a place of controversy. How can we possibly expect to prepare students to succeed in life if we do not expose them to controversial topics and teach them how to listen, research, weigh the facts on *all* sides, and make rational decisions as to what is best for them? We have been concerned to defend the rights of minorities, and that's a good thing; however, that should not mean that we should forbid freedom of expression to those who are not readily recognized as a minority. What is needed is a forum where *everyone* can express their views, beliefs, political opinions, etc, secure in the knowledge that they will not be condemned for having a different view. That involves also learning not to condemn those who disagree. What better place to teach that than in the schools?

Please vote to uphold the First Amendment - vote LD 1640 "Ought to Pass."