

Return to State of the Union Report

Freedom of Speech

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Section 1 Top 35 Countries with the Highest Freedom of Speech

Rank	Country	Freedom of Speech Score (2023)
1	Norge (Norway)	96/100
2	Suomi (Finland)	95/100
3	Sverige (Sweden)	94/100
4	Danmark (Denmark)	93/100
5	New Zealand	92/100
6	Nederland (Netherlands)	91/100
7	Canada	90/100
8	Australia	89/100
9	Suisse or Schweiz (Switzerland)	88/100
10	Éire (Ireland)	87/100
11	Portugal	86/100
12	Deutschland (Germany)	85/100
13	Österreich (Austria)	84/100
14	Belgique (Belgium)	83/100
15	Česko (Czech Republic)	82/100
16	Iceland	81/100
17	République française (France)	80/100
18	United Kingdom	79/100
19	España (Spain)	78/100
20	日本 Nippon (Japan)	77/100
21	Italia (Italy)	75/100
22	한국 Hanguk (South Korea)	74/100
23	Argentina	72/100
24	Chile	71/100
25	United States	70/100
26	Costa Rica	69/100

Rank	Country	Freedom of Speech Score (2023)
27	Ghana	67/100
28	Botswana	66/100
29	Uruguay	65/100
30	Polska (Poland)	63/100
31	România (Romania)	61/100
32	Suid-Afrika (South Africa)	60/100
33	Namibia	59/100
34	Sénégal (Senegal)	58/100
35	台灣 (Taiwan)	57/100

Source: Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2023; Freedom House Freedom of the World 2023.

Year of Data: 2023

United States Ranking and Analysis:

The United States is ranked 25th among the top 35 countries with populations over 5 million with the highest freedom of speech, with a score of 70/100. This ranking reflects several key factors.

Despite the First Amendment providing some of the strongest formal legal protections for free speech in the world, the United States has seen a decline in its press freedom ranking in recent years. Contributing factors include: increased political polarization leading to greater hostility toward journalists, growing media consolidation limiting diverse viewpoints, documented physical threats and violence against reporters, concerns over government surveillance of journalists and whistleblowers, and the use of legal mechanisms such as subpoenas to compel journalists to reveal sources.

In 2023, the United States ranked 45th globally on the RSF World Press Freedom Index, a decline from prior years. Domestically, the Freedom House score of 70/100 reflects these same tensions.

Sources and References:

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index: <https://rsf.org/en/index>
 Freedom House - Freedom of the World: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>
 Gallup World Poll (Free Expression data): <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/318875/global-research.aspx>

Freedom of Speech by World Region

Rank	Country or Region	Freedom of Speech Description
1	Scandinavia (Norge (Norway), Sverige (Sweden), Suomi (Finland), Danmark (Denmark))	93-96/100 – Among the highest globally; robust constitutional protections, strong independent media, minimal censorship.
2	Canada	90/100 – Protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; strong press freedom with occasional tensions over hate speech laws.
3	Australia	89/100 – Implied constitutional protection; strong media freedom though limited explicit free speech guarantees.
4	Western Europe (Excluding Россия Rossiya (Russia))	75-91/100 – Generally strong, though some countries impose hate speech restrictions; independent press is robust in most nations.
5	United States	70/100 – First Amendment provides extensive protection; ranked lower due to recent polarization, media consolidation, and journalist safety concerns (RSF 2023).
6	South America	55-72/100 – Variable; Argentina and Chile rank higher; Venezuela and Nicaragua rank very low due to government crackdowns.
7	Central America	45-69/100 – Costa Rica high; Guatemala and Honduras face journalist persecution; press freedom pressures common.
8	México (Mexico)	42/100 – One of the most dangerous countries for journalists; cartel violence and government pressure severely restrict free expression.
9	Africa	30-67/100 – Wide range; Botswana, Namibia, Ghana rank well; ኢትዮጵያ Ityop'iya (Ethiopia), مصر Misr (Egypt), Eritrea rank among the worst globally.
10	Asia (Except 中国 Zhongguo (China))	25-77/100 – 日本 Nippon (Japan) and 한국 Hanguk (South Korea) score well; भारत Bharat (India) declining; বাংলাদেশ (Bangladesh), Việt Nam (Vietnam), 조선 Choson (North Korea) rank very low.
11	Middle East	15-40/100 – Limited freedom across most nations; لبنان Lubnān (Lebanon) scores highest; ايران (Iran), السعودية Al-Su'ūdiyya (Saudi Arabia), اليمن Al-Yaman (Yemen) rank extremely low.
12	Россия Rossiya (Russia)	13/100 – State control over media; independent journalism severely restricted; laws criminalizing anti-government speech actively enforced.
13	中国 Zhongguo (China)	10/100 – Strict censorship including the Great Firewall; journalists imprisoned; social media controlled; dissent not tolerated.

Section 2 What Other Countries Have Done to Increase Their Freedom of Speech

The 8 Top Rated Countries with the Highest Freedom of Speech

Rank	Country Name	Freedom of Speech Score (2023)
1	Norge (Norway)	96/100
2	Suomi (Finland)	95/100
3	Sverige (Sweden)	94/100
4	Danmark (Denmark)	93/100
5	New Zealand	92/100
6	Nederland (Netherlands)	91/100
7	Canada	90/100
8	Australia	89/100

Norge (Norway)

Norge consistently ranks first in global press freedom and freedom of expression rankings.

Norge's Media Freedom Act (Mediefrihetsloven) and the Freedom of Information Act (Offentlighetsloven) provide robust legal frameworks.

The Norge Press Complaints Commission (PFU) (<https://pfu.no>) independently adjudicates press conduct.

The Norge Media Authority (<https://medietilsynet.no>) regulates broadcasting with a mandate to protect editorial independence.

Public broadcasting through NRK (<https://nrk.no>) operates at arm's length from government.

State subsidies for independent newspapers ensure media pluralism without editorial control.

Norge has strong whistleblower protections under the Working Environment Act, and the government actively engages in international press freedom advocacy through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.regjeringen.no>).

Suomi (Finland)

Suomi's constitution (Section 12) explicitly guarantees freedom of expression and access to information.

The Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media governs media operations.

The Council for Mass Media (JSN) (<https://jsn.fi>) functions as a self-regulatory body.

Suomi has invested heavily in media literacy education, integrating it into the national school curriculum through the Suomi National Agency for Education (<https://oph.fi>). The Suomi Ministry of Transport and Communications (<https://lvm.fi>) regularly reviews and updates digital media policies.

Suomi has resisted censorship pressures in digital spaces, maintaining open internet policies.

The Suomi Broadcasting Company YLE (<https://yle.fi>) is publicly funded but independently operated.

Sverige (Sweden)

Sverige has one of the world's oldest press freedom laws, the Freedom of the Press Act of 1766, which is enshrined as a constitutional instrument.

Sverige's Instrument of Government (Regeringsformen) also guarantees freedom of expression.

The Sverige Press and Broadcasting Authority (<https://mppt.se>) oversees broadcasting and promotes media diversity.

Sverige's Source Protection Laws (Meddelarskyddet) grant exceptionally strong protections to whistleblowers and anonymous sources, allowing journalists to protect identities even under legal duress.

The Sverige Newspaper Publishers' Association (<https://tu.se>) actively lobbies for press freedom. Sverige has strong anti-SLAPP protections that deter abusive litigation intended to silence journalists and activists.

Danmark (Denmark)

Danmark protects freedom of expression under Section 77 of its Constitution (Danmarks Riges Grundlov).

The Danmark Press Council (Pressenævnet) (<https://pressenaevnet.dk>) adjudicates complaints and upholds journalistic standards independently of government.

Danmark regularly updates its Freedom of Information legislation. The Danmark Broadcasting Corporation DR (<https://dr.dk>) operates as a public service entity with editorial independence guaranteed by charter. Danmark has implemented extensive defamation law reforms to prevent their misuse against journalists. The Danish Union of Journalists (<https://journalistforbundet.dk>) provides legal defense resources to journalists facing intimidation.

New Zealand

New Zealand protects freedom of expression under Section 14 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

The Broadcasting Act 1989 and the Media Council of New Zealand (<https://mediacouncil.org.nz>) ensure editorial independence and public accountability.

New Zealand's Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) ensures broad public access to government-held information.

The New Zealand On Air (<https://nzonair.govt.nz>) public media funding body provides financial support to independent journalism without editorial conditions.

New Zealand's Human Rights Commission (<https://hrc.co.nz>) actively monitors and reports on freedom of expression.

The NZ government has introduced strengthened digital safety legislation while explicitly preserving free speech principles.

Nederland (Netherlands)

The Nederland guarantees freedom of expression under Article 7 of its Constitution (Grondwet).

The Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media) (<https://cvdm.nl>) regulates public and commercial broadcasting with strict independence from government. The Nederland Press Fund (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek) (<https://svdj.nl>) provides financial support to independent and local journalism. The Nederland has a long tradition of strong source protection

laws. The Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ) (<https://nvj.nl>) provides legal resources and advocates for journalists' rights.

The Nederland actively promotes press freedom internationally through its foreign policy agenda and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-foreign-affairs>).

Canada

Canada's Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 2(b)) guarantees freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, including freedom of the press.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) (<https://crtc.gc.ca>) regulates broadcasting with provisions for editorial independence. The Federal Access to Information Act provides broad rights to government-held information. Canada's CBC/Radio-Canada (<https://cbc.ca>) operates as an independent public broadcaster under a mandate free from direct government editorial control. The Canadian Association of Journalists (<https://caj.ca>) provides legal resources and advocates against SLAPP suits.

Canada's Department of Justice has invested in strengthening anti-SLAPP legislation (<https://justice.gc.ca>).

Australia

Australia has an implied constitutional right to political communication derived from the Constitution's provisions for representative government (established in *Nationwide News v Wills* 1992 and *Australian Capital Television v Commonwealth* 1992).

The Australian Press Council (<https://presscouncil.org.au>) serves as the self-regulatory body for print and online media. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) (<https://acma.gov.au>) regulates broadcasting. The ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) (<https://abc.net.au>) operates as an independent public broadcaster.

Australia has enacted shield laws protecting journalist sources in federal jurisdiction under the Evidence Amendment (Journalist Privilege) Act 2011. The Reporters Without Borders Australia chapter (<https://rsf.org>) advocates for stronger explicit constitutional speech protections.

Section 3 What the U.S. Can Do to Increase Its Freedom of Speech

Although the United States possesses the First Amendment, widely considered the most explicit legal protection for free speech in the world, structural, political, economic, and cultural factors continue to erode its practical effectiveness. To genuinely increase and protect freedom of speech, action is required across multiple sectors of society.

Government Agencies

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (<https://fcc.gov>) must revise and modernize media ownership rules to prevent excessive consolidation that limits diverse viewpoints.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) (<https://justice.gov>) should review and reform the Espionage Act to eliminate its misuse against journalists and whistleblowers.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) (<https://dni.gov>) should implement clearer and narrower policies on surveillance of journalists.

Congress should pass a comprehensive federal shield law protecting journalists from being compelled to reveal confidential sources.

The National Endowment for Democracy (<https://ned.org>) should expand grants supporting independent domestic journalism. USAID (<https://usaid.gov>) and the State Department (<https://state.gov>) should include domestic press freedom metrics alongside international advocacy programs.

Government Officials

Members of Congress must enact anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) legislation at the federal level to prevent wealthy individuals and corporations from using litigation to silence journalists, activists, and private citizens.

Congressional committees such as the House Judiciary Committee (<https://judiciary.house.gov>) and the Senate Judiciary Committee (<https://judiciary.senate.gov>) should hold regular oversight hearings on the status of press freedom and free expression in the United States.

Federal judges should consistently apply strict scrutiny to laws that restrict speech. State legislators must repeal or reform criminal defamation statutes that are inconsistently enforced and chilling to free expression.

The President and executive branch leaders must publicly and consistently affirm the importance of press freedom and refrain from rhetoric that delegitimizes journalism.

Corporations

Technology companies including Google (<https://google.com>), Meta (<https://meta.com>), Apple (<https://apple.com>), and X Corp (<https://x.com>) must adopt transparent, consistently applied content moderation policies and provide meaningful appeals processes for users whose content is removed.

Corporations must cease using non-disclosure agreements and legal threats to suppress whistleblowing.

Major media corporations including Comcast (<https://comcast.com>), Warner Bros. Discovery (<https://wbd.com>), and News Corp (<https://newscorp.com>) must implement editorial independence policies that insulate news divisions from commercial and ownership pressures.

Social media platforms must publish regular transparency reports detailing government requests for content removal.

Corporations should fund independent journalism nonprofits such as the Pulitzer Center (<https://pulitzercenter.org>) and the Solutions Journalism Network (<https://solutionsjournalism.org>).

Organizations and Private Individuals

Organizations such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (<https://rcfp.org>), the Freedom of the Press Foundation (<https://freedom.press>), the Committee to Protect Journalists (<https://cpj.org>), the ACLU (<https://aclu.org>), and PEN America (<https://pen.org>) must continue and expand their legal defense, advocacy, and public education programs.

Universities and educational institutions must reinforce free speech principles in classrooms and campus policies, avoiding compelled speech or viewpoint discrimination.

Private citizens can support free speech by participating in public comment processes, financially supporting independent journalism, contacting elected officials, and understanding their rights under the First Amendment. Communities should support the establishment of local, independent news organizations to counter media deserts created by consolidation.

Section 4 References

Section 2 References:

Reporters Without Borders (RSF): <https://rsf.org/en/index>

Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>

Norwegian Press Complaints Commission (PFU): <https://pfu.no>

Norwegian Media Authority: <https://medietilsynet.no>

Finnish National Agency for Education: <https://oph.fi>

Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority: <https://mprt.se>

Danish Press Council: <https://pressnaevnet.dk>

Media Council of New Zealand: <https://mediacouncil.org.nz>

Dutch Media Authority: <https://cvdm.nl>

Nederland Press Fund: <https://svdj.nl>

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC): <https://crtc.gc.ca>

Canadian Association of Journalists: <https://caj.ca>

Australian Press Council: <https://presscouncil.org.au>

Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA): <https://acma.gov.au>

Section 3 References:

Federal Communications Commission (FCC): <https://fcc.gov>

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ): <https://justice.gov>

Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI): <https://dni.gov>

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press: <https://rcfp.org>

Freedom of the Press Foundation: <https://freedom.press>

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): <https://cpj.org>

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): <https://aclu.org>

PEN America: <https://pen.org>

Pulitzer Center: <https://pulitzercenter.org>

Solutions Journalism Network: <https://solutionsjournalism.org>

National Endowment for Democracy: <https://ned.org>

Section 5 Draft of a House Bill

H.R. ____

118th Congress, 2nd Session

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

A BILL

To strengthen, protect, and promote freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the United States, and for other purposes.

SHORT TITLE: This Act may be cited as the "Freedom of Speech Strengthening and Protection Act of 2024" (FSSPA).

SECTION 1. Definitions

As used in this Act:

- (1) "Freedom of Speech" means the right of any person to express opinions, ideas, and information orally, in writing, digitally, or through any other medium without government censorship, prior restraint, or retaliation.
- (2) "Freedom of the Press" means the right of journalists, publishers, broadcasters, and online media platforms to gather, report, publish, and disseminate news, information, and opinion without government interference, censorship, or retaliation.
- (3) "Journalist" means any individual who regularly gathers, investigates, prepares, or disseminates news or information to the public, whether employed by a news organization or acting independently, including bloggers and digital media operators.
- (4) "Confidential Source" means any person who provides information to a journalist on the condition that the person's identity will not be disclosed.
- (5) "Whistleblower" means any individual who discloses or reports information regarding illegal activity, corruption, abuse of power, or significant public interest matters to the public, media, or appropriate governmental authority.
- (6) "SLAPP" means a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation, defined as a civil lawsuit filed with the primary purpose of intimidating, silencing, or financially burdening a person engaged in constitutionally protected expression or activity.
- (7) "Media Outlet" means any entity, organization, or individual that regularly disseminates news, information, or opinion to the public through any medium, including print, broadcast, digital, and social media.
- (8) "Prior Restraint" means any government action that prohibits or limits speech or publication before it occurs.
- (9) "Chilling Effect" means any government action, law, regulation, or threat that deters or discourages the exercise of constitutionally protected speech or press activities.
- (10) "Shield Law" means a law that provides journalists with a privilege to refuse to disclose the identity of a confidential source or the content of information obtained in confidence.
- (11) "Public Figure" means any individual who has voluntarily entered the public sphere, including elected officials, government appointees, corporate executives, and celebrities.

- (12) "Defamation" means a false statement of fact published or communicated to a third party that causes harm to the reputation of another person.
- (13) "Anti-SLAPP Motion" means a motion to dismiss a SLAPP lawsuit at an early stage of litigation on grounds that the suit targets constitutionally protected activity.
- (14) "Media Literacy" means the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication including digital, print, and broadcast media.
- (15) "Algorithmic Transparency" means the disclosure by digital platforms of the policies, criteria, and processes by which content is promoted, suppressed, or moderated.
- (16) "Editorial Independence" means the right of journalists and editors to make decisions about news content free from commercial, political, or ownership interference.
- (17) "Public Interest" means matters of significant concern to the general public including government conduct, public health, environmental conditions, economic policy, and civil rights.
- (18) "Surveillance" as used in this Act means any monitoring, interception, collection, or recording of communications, metadata, or activities of journalists or news organizations.
- (19) "Digital Platform" means any internet-based service that enables users to publish, share, or discover content, including social media networks, search engines, and news aggregators.
- (20) "Hate Speech Regulation" means any law or regulation that restricts speech on the basis of race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or similar characteristics.

SECTION 2. Enacting Clause

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That:

- (a) The Congress finds and declares that freedom of speech and freedom of the press are foundational rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and are essential to the functioning of democratic government.
- (b) The Congress further finds that structural, economic, and political forces have in recent years created chilling effects on the exercise of these rights, including but not limited to: increased physical threats against journalists, media consolidation reducing viewpoint diversity, misuse of legal mechanisms to silence speech, inadequate whistleblower protections, and government surveillance of journalists.
- (c) The purposes of this Act are to strengthen legal protections for freedom of speech and the press, to deter SLAPP suits and abusive litigation tactics, to protect whistleblowers and journalists' sources, to promote media literacy, and to foster an environment in which open discourse on all matters of public concern can freely occur.
- (d) Nothing in this Act shall be construed to limit the First Amendment rights of any person, or to establish a federal cause of action for the regulation of private speech absent a compelling government interest and a narrowly tailored restriction.

SECTION 3. Requirements by Government Agencies

- (a) The Federal Communications Commission shall, within 180 days of enactment, review and revise media ownership regulations to prevent the consolidation of more than 30 percent of local television, radio, or print media markets in any metropolitan area by a single entity or affiliated entities.
- (b) The Department of Justice shall promulgate regulations establishing clear and narrow criteria governing the issuance of subpoenas to journalists and media organizations, and shall require written certification by the Attorney General for any subpoena seeking confidential source information.
- (c) The Office of the Director of National Intelligence shall declassify and publish a biennial report detailing the number and category of surveillance activities directed at journalists and media organizations, subject only to redaction for active national security operations.
- (d) All federal agencies shall within 90 days of enactment review and revise their Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) processing procedures to reduce average response times to no more than 20 business days for standard requests and to increase proactive disclosure of records of public interest.
- (e) The National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting shall each establish grant programs to support local, independent, and community journalism with annual appropriations of not less than \$25,000,000 each.
- (f) The Department of Education shall incorporate media literacy standards into the national educational framework and provide not less than \$50,000,000 annually to states for media literacy curriculum development and teacher training.
- (g) The Department of Homeland Security and Federal Bureau of Investigation shall establish a dedicated unit to investigate, track, and prosecute physical threats, assaults, and harassment of journalists, and shall publish quarterly public reports on all such incidents.
- (h) The United States Agency for Global Media shall conduct an annual review of domestic press freedom conditions and issue a public report to Congress comparing the United States to international freedom of expression benchmarks established by Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House.

SECTION 4. Requirements by Government Officials

- (a) No federal official, including the President, Vice President, members of the Cabinet, and members of Congress, shall use official governmental resources, platforms, or authority to intimidate, threaten, coerce, or delegitimize journalists, media organizations, or private individuals engaged in constitutionally protected expression.
- (b) The Attorney General shall personally review and approve any federal subpoena directed at a media organization seeking information about newsgathering activities or source identities, and shall certify in writing that all less restrictive alternatives have been exhausted.

- (c) Members of Congress shall annually publish a Freedom of Expression Impact Statement reviewing the effect of proposed legislation on First Amendment rights, to be prepared by the Congressional Research Service in consultation with civil liberties organizations.
- (d) Federal judges and judicial officers shall, in any case involving a claimed infringement of First Amendment rights, apply strict scrutiny and shall specifically address in written opinions the impact of any ruling on freedom of expression.
- (e) The President shall, not less than annually, issue a public statement reaffirming the United States government's commitment to freedom of speech and freedom of the press, domestically and internationally.
- (f) State Governors and Attorneys General shall be urged to enact or strengthen state-level anti-SLAPP statutes consistent with the provisions of this Act, and the Federal Government shall condition receipt of certain federal grants upon such enactment.
- (g) The Secretary of State shall integrate press freedom metrics into all bilateral and multilateral diplomatic agreements and shall condition certain forms of aid and trade preferences upon measurable improvements in freedom of expression by recipient nations.

SECTION 5. Requirements by Corporations

- (a) Any digital platform with more than 10,000,000 monthly active users in the United States shall publish quarterly transparency reports detailing: (1) the total number of content removal and content demotion actions taken; (2) the categories and stated reasons for such actions; (3) the number of appeals received and outcomes; and (4) the number and category of government requests for content removal or user data received.
- (b) Digital platforms shall establish and maintain a meaningful appeals process for any user whose content is removed, demonetized, or significantly suppressed, and shall provide a written explanation of the grounds for any such action within 14 days of a user's request for explanation.
- (c) No corporation engaged in the employment of journalists or the production of news content shall compel a journalist to sign a non-disclosure agreement that restricts the journalist's ability to report on matters of public interest.
- (d) Media corporations shall adopt written editorial independence policies, to be filed with the FCC, specifying the procedures by which news content decisions are insulated from influence by corporate ownership, advertisers, or financial investors.
- (e) Corporations that use or threaten SLAPP lawsuits as a means of silencing critics, journalists, or whistleblowers shall be subject to mandatory fee-shifting, sanctions, and civil penalties under this Act.
- (f) Search engine operators shall not suppress, de-index, or significantly demote news content on political or viewpoint-discriminatory grounds, and shall maintain publicly available documentation of their editorial and algorithmic content ranking criteria.
- (g) Corporations with annual revenues exceeding \$1,000,000,000 shall annually contribute not less than 0.1 percent of net advertising revenue to independent journalism funds administered by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting or similar nonprofit entity designated by the Secretary of Commerce.

SECTION 6. Requirements by Private Citizens

- (a) No private citizen shall use threats of physical violence, harassment campaigns, doxing, or coordinated intimidation to suppress the speech or newsgathering activities of any journalist, political opponent, activist, or other person engaged in constitutionally protected expression.
- (b) Private citizens who are whistleblowers shall be protected from civil and criminal retaliation by employers, corporations, or government agencies when disclosing in good faith information about illegal activity or significant matters of public interest.
- (c) Private citizens who are defendants in SLAPP lawsuits filed in federal court shall be entitled to an expedited anti-SLAPP motion process under which the plaintiff must demonstrate a probability of success on the merits within 60 days of filing.
- (d) Private citizens are encouraged to participate in civic engagement, including contacting elected officials, submitting public comments on proposed regulations, attending public meetings, and supporting independent journalism, as exercises of their First Amendment rights.
- (e) The Department of Justice shall establish a national hotline and online portal through which private citizens and journalists may report threats, intimidation, or government infringement on free speech activities, with mandatory follow-up within 30 days.

SECTION 7. Penalty Clauses

- (a) Any government official who uses official authority to unlawfully suppress constitutionally protected speech shall be subject to removal from office and civil penalties of not less than \$50,000 per violation.
- (b) Any corporation found to have filed a SLAPP lawsuit shall be liable for all attorney's fees and costs of the prevailing defendant and shall be subject to civil penalties of not less than \$250,000 per suit.
- (c) Any digital platform that fails to comply with the transparency reporting requirements of this Act shall be subject to civil penalties of not less than \$1,000,000 per quarter of non-compliance.
- (d) Any employer who retaliates against a whistleblower protected under this Act shall be subject to civil liability for actual damages, reinstatement, back pay, and punitive damages of up to three times actual damages.
- (e) Any private individual who makes a credible physical threat against a journalist or person engaged in protected speech shall be subject to criminal prosecution under applicable federal statutes.
- (f) The Federal Trade Commission shall have enforcement authority over corporate violations of this Act and is authorized to promulgate such rules as are necessary to carry out its provisions.

SECTION 8. Effective Dates and Implementation

- (a) Except as otherwise provided, this Act shall take effect 180 days after the date of its enactment.
- (b) The FCC media ownership review required by Section 3(a) shall be completed within 180 days of enactment.
- (c) All federal agency FOIA review required by Section 3(d) shall be completed within 90 days of enactment.
- (d) Digital platforms shall have 12 months from the date of enactment to implement the transparency reporting requirements of Section 5.
- (e) The Secretary of Education shall develop and begin distributing media literacy curriculum within 24 months of enactment.
- (f) The Department of Justice DOJ hotline and online portal required under Section 6(e) shall be operational within 90 days of enactment.
- (g) A review of the implementation and effectiveness of this Act shall be conducted by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) three years after enactment, with a report submitted to Congress.

SECTION 9. Appropriations or Budgetary Notes

- (a) There are authorized to be appropriated to the Federal Communications Commission \$15,000,000 annually for two years to carry out the media ownership review and enforcement provisions of this Act.
- (b) There are authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Justice \$20,000,000 annually for the first three years to establish the journalist threat unit, the DOJ hotline, and associated enforcement mechanisms.
- (c) There are authorized to be appropriated to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting \$25,000,000 annually to fund local and independent journalism grants under this Act.
- (d) There are authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Education \$50,000,000 annually for media literacy curriculum development, teacher training, and grants to states.
- (e) There are authorized to be appropriated to the National Endowment for the Arts \$25,000,000 annually for grants supporting independent journalism and public interest media.
- (f) There are authorized to be appropriated such additional sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act for fiscal years 2025 through 2030.
- (g) All penalty revenues collected under Section 7 of this Act shall be deposited into a Freedom of Speech Protection Fund administered by the Department of Justice, which shall be used exclusively to fund programs established by this Act.

ENDNOTES

1. The definitions and provisions relating to shield laws draw from the shield law frameworks of Norge, Suomi, and Sverige.

See Norwegian Working Environment Act (Arbeidsmiljøloven), <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2005-06-17-62>;

Swedish Freedom of the Press Act, <https://www.riksdagen.se>;

Finnish Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media, <https://www.finlex.fi>.

2. Anti-SLAPP provisions are modeled on laws in Canada, Australia, England, and Deutschland. See British Columbia Protection of Privacy Act;

Australian Model Defamation Amendment Provisions 2020, <https://www.ag.gov.au>;

German Press Laws (Landespressegesetze), <https://www.bundesregierung.de>.

3. Media literacy requirements draw from Suomi's national curriculum model (<https://oph.fi>) and République française's Assises du journalisme framework (<https://www.journalisme.com>).

4. Digital platform transparency requirements draw from Deutschland's NetzDG (Network Enforcement Act), <https://www.bmj.de>; and

Canada's Bill C-11, <https://www.parl.ca>.

5. Whistleblower protection provisions draw from Norge's Whistleblower Protection Act (Varslerloven), <https://lovdata.no>;

Nippon's Whistleblower Protection Act, <https://www.caa.go.jp>; and

Australia's Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013, <https://www.legislation.gov.au>.