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Americans wield the weapon of a voice against injustice. I proudly do, because I am without any other weapons at my disposal. That is why I feel threatened by the people who believe that schools should be given the right to take away the one weapon I have.

Our country is experiencing the eruption of a heated debate about whether public schools should have the power to punish their students for their off-campus speech. I am alarmed that this is even up for debate. The people who support this power argue that schools need to protect their students and prevent disruptions at school. Are schools protecting their students, or themselves? Public schools should never be given this authority because of how easily it could be abused to improve their image. Students deserve the freedom to contribute to public debate, especially if that debate involves their school. Students should never fear being punished for their criticism, even if delivered untraditionally.

When B.L. criticized her school's cheerleading system (Mahanoy Area School District vs BL), her posts, from a broader perspective, sparked public debate and pushed for a change. School is made for children, and if those children are not allowed to criticize their school, then this country would be unable to improve its future generation's education. Public debate is one of the easiest ways to gather conflicting opinions and choose the most suitable solution to any problem. If public schools were allowed to punish students on the premise that their speech insulted the school, then schools would lose the benefits of public debate and fail to adapt to the needs of students living in the modern world.

As a student, I want to improve my school by adding to public discourse. I want to be released from its draining rules that regulate my speech and activity. In school, I am told to speak when asked and to use "appropriate" words. I am asked to avoid controversial topics unless they pertain to the conversation. If I had to follow those rules off-campus, I would be forced to limit what I say to please the system. I would never discover the weapon of free speech and learn of its capability to help fix the world. The school silenced B.L. when she used words they did not approve of; if given the chance, they may silence me. It is my First Amendment right to express opinions, even if those opinions are hurtful; in BL's case in court, this was held to be true.

Do not give schools the power to silence future generations and prevent their critique from stifling the public. Our democracy, a system of government made to incorporate the opinions of all people, would be given the capability of censoring a quarter of the population to a handful of public-school officials. That is not the United States that I grew up loving. The United States I love would choose freedom of speech above all.