Missouri House of Representatives

Rep. Dirk Deaton Co-Sponsors Campus Rights Bill

JEFFERSON CITY, MO – State Representative Dirk Deaton (R) this week applauded the signing of Senate Bill 160 by Governor Mike Kehoe, calling it a landmark win for free expression and the constitutional rights of students at Missouri's public colleges and universities.

The legislation, championed for several sessions in the Missouri House by Rep. Deaton and carried this year by Sen. Brad Hudson and Rep. Darin Chappell, ensures that belief-based student organizations cannot be discriminated against or denied access to campus resources because of their views or leadership requirements. The new law creates legal avenues for students and associations to seek relief through the courts if their rights are violated.

"With the Governor's signature, the state is sending a clear message that free speech is not negotiable," said Rep. Deaton. "Public institutions cannot silence or sideline student organizations because of their convictions."

Under SB 160, public institutions of higher learning are prohibited from taking adverse action against student groups based on the group's beliefs or internal leadership criteria. These protections apply to religious, political, and ideological organizations alike, ensuring they have equal access to campus facilities, communication channels, and funding opportunities available to all student groups.

"While some may challenge individuals' ability to express their convictions and views, Missouri remains committed to protecting the rights of its citizens as recognized in the First Amendment.", said Deaton."

Rep. Representative Dirk Deaton represents McDonald and Newton counties (District 159) in the Missouri House of Representatives. He was elected to his first two-year term in November 2018 and re-elected in 2020 and 2022. For more information, please contact Rep. Deaton by email at Dirk.Deaton@house.mo.gov.

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