STUDENT SENATE BILL 2026-1116

TITLE: Resolution Affirming the Importance of Civil Discourse and Free Expression

AUTHOR(S): Majority Party Leader Selena Patel, Senator Ethan Simon

SPONSOR(S): Senate President Molly Murphy, Senate President Pro Tempore Kate Finfrock, Judiciary Chair Berkley Morris

WHEREAS, in January 2021, then Florida Board of Governors Chair Syd Kitson established the Civil Discourse Initiative, in response to growing concerns about the decline of respectful dialogue among those with differing viewpoints, emphasizing the role universities play [1]; and,

WHEREAS, prominent American intellectuals Cornell West and Robert George proclaim the utility of discourse as a means of being a "truth seeker" with persuasion as simply a possible consequence of quality discourse [2]; and,

WHEREAS, Vice-Chair Timothy Cerio has stated in the Florida Board of Governors Final Report on free expression that "Civil discourse, conducted civilly without fear of reprisal, is critical to free speech and ensuring academic and intellectual freedom not just on our university campuses but throughout our country" [1]; and,

WHEREAS, In the Florida Board of Governors Final Report on civil discourse they stipulated that in order to "Instill the importance of civil discourse, academic freedom, and free speech from day one, utilizing student and employee orientation sessions, public assemblies, and official university documents and communications" [1]; and,

WHEREAS, a core value of the University of Florida is Freedom & Civility, meaning "the freedom to inquire and express ideas without condemnation, and to show respect for the right of others to do the same." [3]; and,

WHEREAS, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the freedom of expression, stipulating "Congress shall make no law respecting …abridging the freedom of speech" [4]; and,

WHEREAS, John Locke defines civil use of words as "a communication of thoughts and ideas by words, as may serve for the upholding common conversation and commerce, about the ordinary affairs and conveniences of civil life, in the societies of men one amongst another." [5]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida Student Senate has previously affirmed its support for free expression and civil discourse [6] [7]; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate believes that all individuals should be allowed to express sentiments and disagree civilly in a

capacity where they are free from being bullied, threatened, or silenced at the University of Florida.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate maintains that all members of on-campus communities should have an equal ability to express their ideas and opinions while campus order and security are preserved.

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate wholeheartedly endorses sentiments expressed by the Florida Board of Governors in their Statement of Free Expression and pledges itself to the principle of civil discourse.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to University of Florida President Stuart Bell, *Student Body President Matthew Bravo, Florida Board of Governors Chair Alan Levine, Florida Board of Governors Vice Chair Timothy Cerio*

[1] https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SPC_09_Civil-Discourse_Final_CE.pdf
[2] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dagVF5VoOLCu-DGHIACBawFMqlzArsLE/view
[3] https://news.ufl.edu/2021/01/uf-values-to-serve-as-shared-foundation/
[4] https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/
[5] Locke, John *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
[6]https://drive.google.com/file/d/1azifuhxRRkh8CPRUKmLdhAi9G7HhHm4h/view
[7]https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cGS3PEIRqj7qvxv5YcZEVgh7Y3Z3LY0l/view