

Don't Mess with the First Amendment in Texas

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While current events are garnering a lot of attention on First Amendment rights and the need for government transparency, it is worth noting that Texas has some of the nation's strongest laws protecting the rights of a free press and free speech.

But it was not always this way. The current environment for free speech in Texas took over a decade of hard hitting legislative efforts, strong support from key lawmakers, and compromise with both allies and opponents, to make Texas one of the most favorable environments for First Amendment rights in the country.

In the 1990s and 2000s, attorney Laura Lee Prather, like many other attorneys who represent media companies, had a close-up view of the punishing effect that defamation lawsuits and subpoenas against journalists had on the media and on the public's right to know. She saw the way in which subpoenas and lawsuits were used as weapons to stifle speech, and knew the system needed to be changed. She began actively working to pass laws to prevent abuses of the system that for decades had been plaguing the Fourth Estate and citizens who speak out. What started as a single effort to protect journalists' independence evolved into more than a decade-long campaign of improving free speech and transparency rights for all Texans.

Excerpted from the *Journal of the Texas Supreme Court Historical Society*. To read the full article, click [here](#).