

# The Delray Democrat

## DeSantis Moves to Quell Political Dissent<sup>1</sup>

*Florida Senator Lori Berman*

Freedom of speech, the linchpin of any democracy, is under attack in Ron DeSantis' Florida. The Governor's Department of Management Services (DMS), which oversees the Capitol complex, has proposed new rules that would empower Capitol Police to remove individuals exercising their first amendment right. Under the rules, protestors can be removed and charged with trespassing if police believe their "displays and sounds are indecent, material arouses prurient interests... or their behavior creates a hazard or disruption to performance of official duties."

On December 1, DMS held a meeting to discuss the proposed rules, and many Floridians – lawyers, ministers, historians, lobbyists, university students, and mothers included – attended and voiced their disgust with this blatant attempt to chill their speech. Questions regarding whether organized advocacy groups would be able to attend press conferences, meet with legislators at their offices and outside the House and Senate chambers, and simply speak during public comment in committee rooms all arose. The goal of Republicans is clear: to create confusion, fear, and silence as they ram their extreme agenda forward.

It is not enough for Florida Republicans to have a gerrymandered supermajority in both the House and Senate, with which they can do whatever they'd like. Now, they don't even want to hear criticism either. That's not democratic, it's authoritarian. Florida history is replete with its citizens peaceably assembling at the seat of their state government to give voice to the voiceless and to the powerless. Freedom of speech in the halls of our Capitol allowed for citizens to protest against racial segregation in the 1960s, against the dangerous "Stand your Ground" law in 2013, and for substantive gun safety reform in the wake of the Parkland massacre. If anti-speech rules were in place at the time, these protests might not have occurred and might not have led to any change at all. With freedom of speech comes public pressure and accountability. Without that pillar of accountability, government no longer acts in the interests of its people, but in the interests of itself.

Republicans are preparing a vicious assault on our civil rights and liberties as we speak. More anti-LGBTQ policies, further restrictions on abortion, voter suppression laws, and dangerous gun laws are all in the works. Irrespective of the anti-speech rules promulgated by DMS, Floridians will protest – as is their constitutional right. The only question is whether DeSantis will follow through with his authoritarian crackdown.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Delray Democrat](#), December 2022, page 1.