



New England **First Amendment** Coalition

2025
Year in Review

Democracy Is Local



Democracy Is Local: NEFAC 2025 Year in Review

Across New England, the health of our democracy is determined in city halls, school committee rooms, trial courts, and community meeting spaces. In 2025, the New England First Amendment Coalition helped keep those forums open, informed and accountable, defending free speech and a free press while making government more transparent for everyone.

Supported by donors and partners throughout the region, NEFAC remains a nimble and deeply local advocate. The coalition responded to new threats to press freedom, challenged secrecy in courts and public agencies, and gave journalists, students and residents practical tools to exercise their First Amendment and open government rights.

Over the past year NEFAC appeared in more than 100 news stories and interviews, filed legal briefs and policy letters in state and federal matters, convened legal and advocacy teams in all six New England states and delivered dozens of free lessons and workshops that reached well over 1,000 participants. This year-end snapshot highlights how those efforts are strengthening democracy in our own backyard.

Defending Free Expression and Public Participation

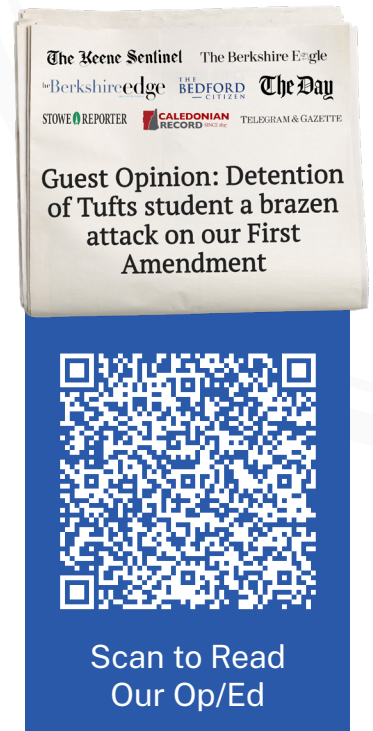
NEFAC's advocacy in 2025 focused on the people and institutions that keep communities informed. In **Massachusetts**, the coalition opposed a court order targeting a reporter in the Karen Read case and testified for a much-needed shield law to protect journalists and their sources. The coalition also weighed in on a **Maine** case involving criticism of the lobster industry and an overbroad application of libel law.



When a Tufts doctoral student and opinion writer was detained by federal immigration authorities, NEFAC and partners condemned the action as a threat to academic and press freedoms. The coalition also joined national advocates urging a federal court to reject a presidential executive order that would impose sanctions on certain law firms and make it harder for journalists and news organizations to secure independent legal counsel.

In **New Hampshire**, NEFAC showed that democratic participation requires more than a seat in the room. In Manchester and Nashua, the coalition challenged local meeting rules that targeted “uncivil” comments, profanity, banners, and signs, explaining how such limits can silence criticism of those in government. Manchester officials ultimately removed the unconstitutional restrictions, restoring residents’ ability to address alleged police misconduct and other matters of public concern in their own words.

Throughout the region, NEFAC continued to defend the right to record government officials in public spaces. The coalition co-authored an amicus brief in a **Connecticut** right-to-record case and supported residents and journalists in communities such as Milton, **Vermont**. NEFAC argued in these cases that recording public officials performing public duties is a core First Amendment activity in an era when video often drives accountability.

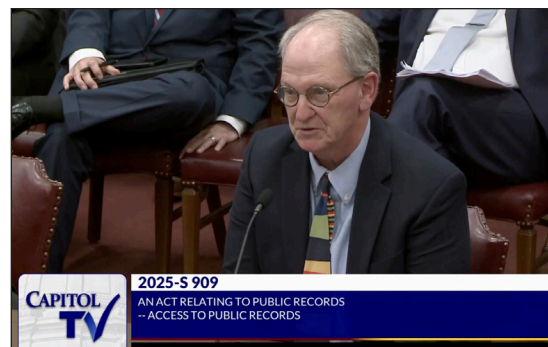


Opening Courts, Records, and Meetings

Alongside its work on free speech rights, NEFAC sought to ensure that public information is accessible in practice, not just in theory. In **Massachusetts**, the coalition pressed trial courts to address inconsistent and opaque practices around access to search warrant records that are vital for reporting on criminal justice and public safety. NEFAC also urged state officials to allow the disclosure of records related to a five-year-old who died after being hit by a school bus. NEFAC argued that a narrow reading of a 2022 state law was keeping families and reporters from learning what happened and how similar tragedies might be prevented.

In **Rhode Island**, NEFAC weighed in on the planned rollout of a new online court records system, calling early rules a major disappointment and pushing for technology and policies that reflect the presumption of openness. The coalition testified in favor of common-sense reforms to the state's Access to Public Records Act, opposed proposals that would extend response times and increase fees, and warned that blocking new requests from residents with small unpaid balances would create unnecessary barriers to oversight. Through op-eds in local news outlets and public testimony, NEFAC called attention to a broader culture of secrecy in many municipalities and made the case that transparency is a prerequisite for public trust.

At the same time, the coalition advocated for public meetings that reflect how people live and work today. In **Massachusetts**, NEFAC continued its multi-year push for open meeting reforms that would require hybrid access so residents can participate in person or remotely. In **Vermont**, the coalition urged the state judiciary to adopt a default practice of livestreaming criminal proceedings, making them accessible to journalists and other community members who cannot be in the courtroom.



Scan to Watch
Our Testimony

Educating and Equipping the Information Ecosystem

NEFAC's education programs translate complex law into practical guidance that can be used in newsrooms, classrooms and community spaces. In 2025, these programs continued to expand in reach and relevance, providing free access to expertise for journalists, students, educators and civic leaders across New England and beyond. The monthly **30 Minute Skills** series offered concise, high impact lessons led by working journalists, media attorneys and academics. Sessions covered topics such as business, education and broadcast reporting, copyright and fair use in the age of social media and artificial intelligence, covering marginalized communities with care, securing communications with tools like Signal, and navigating the complexities of federal immigration records.



Other workshops walked participants through launching a nonprofit newsroom and podcast and building professional networks that can sustain public interest journalism. Hundreds of people registered for these online programs, which remain freely available as part of NEFAC's growing library of video tutorials.

As part of its multi-media Freedom of Information Guide, NEFAC produced state-specific trainings on the right to record government officials, meetings, courts and public documents. Taught by leading media lawyers, these lessons clarified when and how individuals can document government activity safely and lawfully.

With its **First Amendment and the Free Press** initiative, NEFAC brought expert speakers to classrooms, campuses and community centers throughout New England to discuss the critical role journalism plays in our democracy. The coalition spoke with students at the South Shore Charter Public School in Massachusetts and at the New England High School Journalism Collaborative about the First Amendment and the role of a free press. On college and university campuses, including Boston University, Simmons University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and the Community College of Rhode Island, NEFAC led guest lectures and workshops on open records, modern libel standards, and press freedom in the digital age.

NEFAC also participated in democracy-focused programs for international delegations in partnership with WorldBoston and the U.S. Department of State. Officials and journalists from countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America met with NEFAC representatives to discuss how transparency and an independent press support democratic accountability. These exchanges underscored the reality that local battles for access in New England are part of a global conversation about government, information and power.

In October, NEFAC hosted its annual **New England First Amendment Awards**, honoring local and national journalists and advocates, including CNN's John King. That same month, the coalition welcomed 32 working New England journalists and student fellows to its 15th annual **Gloria L. Negri First Amendment Institute**. Concluding with three days of in-person programming at Boston University, the Institute provided local workshops and online training for investigative journalism techniques, records-based reporting and legal strategies for obtaining information. Industry leaders shared lessons from their own public service work, while NEFAC's mentorship program and customized newsroom trainings, including a session with MassLive staff in Worcester, provided ongoing legal and ethical guidance.



Building Legal Capacity and Looking Ahead

A major development in 2025 was the launch of the **NEFAC Legal Fund**, a one-of-its-kind regional resource to support journalism and open government litigation. Backed by a multi-year commitment from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the fund is designed to help close the gap between what the law promises and what under-resourced newsrooms and community watchdogs can realistically enforce.

The NEFAC Legal Fund will be used for journalism and open government litigation, including cases with the potential to clarify public records and open meetings law, protect source confidentiality and discourage future attempts to restrict press freedom. Support may be provided in matters where NEFAC is a party and in cases brought by others that raise significant questions about access and accountability. By directing resources to strategic litigation, the coalition aims to secure state and federal court decisions that benefit the broader public, not just the individuals involved.

As the region looks toward 2026, the need for this work is only growing. Press freedom remains at risk, local journalism is stretched thin and governments are experimenting with new ways to limit scrutiny, from closed digital systems to restrictive meeting policies. Against this backdrop, NEFAC's local focus has become even more important. By combining legal expertise, public advocacy, and practical education, the coalition helps make sure that New England communities can see and understand what is being done in their name.

Your support makes this possible. A tax-deductible year-end gift to the New England First Amendment Coalition helps defend free speech and a free press and open doors to public information. The coalition is equipping the next generation of journalists with the tools and resources needed for critical government accountability reporting, helping community watchdogs push for transparency and pursuing strategic cases that protect rights across all six New England states.

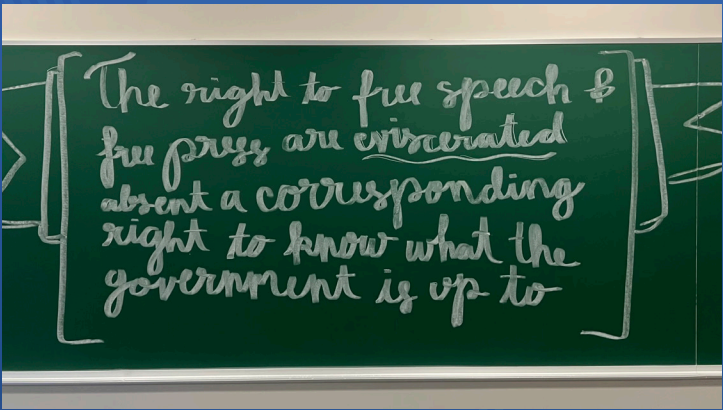
Democracy is local. Together we can keep it strong.



Help us continue our work as democracy defenders in 2026.

Your gift keeps the lights on in New England's democracy. Make a year end contribution today so communities can continue to see, question, and hold power accountable.

Scan the QR code or visit: nefac.org/donations





New England
First Amendment Coalition

111 Milk Street
Westborough, MA 01581



What is NEFAC? (video)

The New England First Amendment Coalition is the region's leading defender of First Amendment freedoms and government transparency — the foundation of a healthy democracy.

Scan the QR code to see us in action.