Follow the Claim

How public discussion helps residents examine government decisions

USG.C.8.3.A "Explain how the Constitution protects the individual's ability to engage in informed public discourse as a means to monitor government officials and institutions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each First Amendment protection named in the passage. Circle an action residents take that uses a protection to test or challenge an official claim.

The Price of New Buses

1. Imagine a city council plans to replace aging buses with a new fleet. At a public meeting, officials say the contract is affordable. A local reporter compares the proposed price with last year's budget and asks who will pay for maintenance. Residents read the report, check the council's published budget, and debate whether the claim holds up. The Constitution does not promise that every official will answer every question. The First Amendment does protect speech and the press, allowing people to question officials and share findings without government punishment simply for criticizing them.

2. One resident requests the contract through a state public records law. That law, not the First Amendment, supplies the procedure for seeking the document. After reading it, residents notice a clause that could raise costs. They post their analysis, distribute leaflets, and organize a peaceful gathering outside city hall. The First Amendment protects peaceful assembly and public discussion, so the group can compare evidence and challenge the council's estimate together. Officials may enforce reasonable, content-neutral rules about when and where people gather, but they cannot ban the gathering merely because its message criticizes the contract.

3. At the next council meeting, residents submit a petition asking for a new cost estimate and an explanation of the clause. The First Amendment protects their right to petition the government for a response or change, although it does not guarantee that officials will agree. A council member then announces a public review of the contract. Reporting, debate, assembly, and petition did not decide the policy by themselves. They gave people ways to test an official claim, make concerns visible, and press decision-makers to account for their choices. That is how informed public discourse helps residents monitor government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do freedom of speech and freedom of the press help residents examine the council's claim that the bus contract is affordable?

2. How does the public records law help residents take part in informed discussion? Explain why requesting the contract under that law is different from using a First Amendment protection.

3. How does the right to peaceful assembly help residents monitor the council, and what kind of rule may officials still enforce?

4. How can petitioning the council hold officials accountable, even if the Constitution does not guarantee the result residents want?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine county officials say a new recycling program will cost less than the old one. In 4 to 5 sentences, explain how residents could check that claim and use two distinct First Amendment protections to discuss the evidence and hold officials accountable. State one limit on what the Constitution guarantees.

ANSWER KEY

Follow the Claim

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.8.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each First Amendment protection named in the passage. Circle an action residents take that uses a protection to test or challenge an official claim. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do freedom of speech and freedom of the press help residents examine the council's claim that the bus contract is affordable?	**A reporter can compare prices and ask questions, while residents can share findings and debate the claim without government punishment simply for criticizing officials.**
2	How does the public records law help residents take part in informed discussion? Explain why requesting the contract under that law is different from using a First Amendment protection.	**The state law provides a way to seek the contract, which residents use to find a possible cost increase. The procedure for requesting it comes from state law, while the First Amendment protects their public discussion of what they find.**
3	How does the right to peaceful assembly help residents monitor the council, and what kind of rule may officials still enforce?	**Residents can gather to compare evidence and challenge the council's estimate. Officials may enforce reasonable, content-neutral rules about when and where they gather.**
4	How can petitioning the council hold officials accountable, even if the Constitution does not guarantee the result residents want?	**The petition asks officials for a new cost estimate and an explanation of the contract clause. It presses them to address residents' concerns, but officials are not required to agree.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Residents could compare the county's published spending figures with its new cost estimate. They could use freedom of speech to discuss any difference at a neighborhood meeting. A local newspaper could report their findings under freedom of the press. Residents could petition county officials to explain the numbers and revise the plan if needed. The Constitution protects these ways of speaking and petitioning, but it does not require officials to change the program.

Accept other plausible ways to check the cost claim and any two distinct First Amendment protections used to discuss evidence or seek accountability. The stated limit should not treat access to all records, an official answer, or a policy change as constitutionally guaranteed.