

By: Representative Smith (35th)

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 522

1 AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO DEVELOP AND
2 IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE K-12 PROGRAM FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION; TO
3 PRESCRIBE THE CHARACTER TRAITS TO BE DEVELOPED BY THE PROGRAM; TO
4 REQUIRE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO REVIEW SCHOOL DISTRICTS'
5 PROPOSED CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS; TO AMEND SECTION 37-13-7,
6 MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO PROVIDE THAT STUDENTS WITH A
7 RELIGIOUS OR CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION SHALL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SAY
8 THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

10 SECTION 1. The local school boards of the public school
11 districts, in their discretion, may develop and implement, at the
12 beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, a comprehensive program
13 for character education in Grades K-12. This program of character
14 education shall focus on students' development of the following
15 character traits: courage, patriotism, citizenship, honesty,
16 pride in quality work, fairness, respect for and obedience to the
17 law, respect for others, kindness, cooperation, self-respect,
18 self-control, courtesy, compassion, diligence, generosity,
19 punctuality, cleanliness, cheerfulness, school pride, respect for
20 the environment, patience, creativity, sportsmanship, loyalty,
21 perseverance, friendship, responsibility and self-discipline. The
22 program of character education shall include the Pledge of
23 Allegiance to the flag as required in Section 37-13-7. The
24 definition of the character traits chosen by the school district
25 for implementation shall reflect and be in keeping with both the
26 spirit and the letter of the following founding documents: the
27 Mississippi Constitution of 1890; the Constitution of the United
28 States of America; the Declaration of Independence; and state and
29 federal law. A public school may not define or teach character or
30 character traits in any manner that might promote or encourage

31 students to participate in conduct that would violate any state or
32 federal law.

33 SECTION 2. Assessment of the students' understanding of the
34 character traits chosen to be taught in public school shall be
35 limited to and must reflect the material taught in the classroom.
36 Students shall not be evaluated in any way as to whether or not
37 the students evidence a specific character trait in their own
38 lives.

39 SECTION 3. The State Board of Education shall review the
40 proposed character education programs of the individual school
41 districts to ascertain if the programs comply with the criteria
42 set forth in Section 1 of this act. Review of the programs shall
43 not exceed a time period of sixty (60) days. If a review extends
44 beyond this time period, the proposal will be deemed in compliance
45 with the law.

46 If the proposed character education program is rejected, the
47 State Board of Education shall set forth in writing the specific
48 areas of objection. These objections must be based on and limited
49 to the following criteria: the definition of the character traits
50 chosen by the school district for implementation shall reflect and
51 be in keeping with both the spirit and letter of our founding
52 documents; no instruction shall promote or encourage participation
53 in any conduct that would violate existing state or federal law;
54 and no student shall be assessed or evaluated as to whether or not
55 the student evidences a specific character trait in his or her own
56 life.

57 SECTION 4. Section 37-13-7, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
58 amended as follows:

59 37-13-7. (1) The boards of trustees of the public schools
60 of this state shall require the teachers under their control to
61 have all pupils repeat the oath of allegiance to the flag of the
62 United States of America at least once during each school month,
63 such oath of allegiance being as follows:

64 "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of
65 America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under
66 God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

67 (2) The official pledge of the State of Mississippi shall
68 read as follows:

69 "I salute the flag of Mississippi and the sovereign state for
70 which it stands with pride in her history and achievements and
71 with confidence in her future under the guidance of Almighty God."

72 The Pledge of Allegiance to the Mississippi flag shall be
73 taught in the public schools of this state, along with the Pledge
74 of Allegiance to the United States flag.

75 (3) A pupil with a religious or conscientious objection
76 shall not be required to repeat the Pledge of Allegiance to the
77 United States or the Mississippi flag.

78 SECTION 5. This act shall take effect and be in force from
79 and after July 1, 1999.