

By: Senator(s) DeBar, Rhodes

To: Education

SENATE BILL NO. 2172

1 AN ACT TO REQUIRE EACH PUBLIC SCHOOL AND POSTSECONDARY
2 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION TO DISPLAY THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE
3 MAYFLOWER COMPACT, THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, AND
4 HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL FACTS ABOUT THE STATE OF
5 MISSISSIPPI IN A CONSPICUOUS PLACE IN EACH EDUCATIONAL BUILDING IT
6 USES AND IN EACH CLASSROOM IN EACH SCHOOL UNDER ITS JURISDICTION;
7 TO PROVIDE A HISTORICAL CONTEXT STATEMENT TO BE DISPLAYED WITH THE
8 TEN COMMANDMENTS; TO REQUIRE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO
9 SUPPLY THE HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL FACTS ABOUT
10 MISSISSIPPI TO BE DISPLAYED; TO SPECIFY THAT THIS ACT SHALL NOT
11 REQUIRE THE GOVERNING AUTHORITY OF A SCHOOL OR POSTSECONDARY
12 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION TO SPEND ITS FUNDS TO PURCHASE DISPLAYS;
13 TO AUTHORIZE SUCH GOVERNING AUTHORITIES TO FUND THE DISPLAYS FREE
14 OF CHARGE BY ACCEPTING DONATED DISPLAYS OR DONATED FUNDS TO
15 PURCHASE THE DISPLAYS; TO DIRECT THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO
16 ADOPT RULES AND REGULATIONS TO ENSURE THE PROPER IMPLEMENTATION OF
17 THIS ACT; TO DIRECT THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO IDENTIFY
18 APPROPRIATE RESOURCES FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THIS ACT THAT ARE FREE
19 OF CHARGE, AND TO LIST SUCH FREE RESOURCES ON ITS WEBSITE; AND FOR
20 RELATED PURPOSES.

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

22 **SECTION 1.** The Legislature finds that:

23 (a) In 2005, the Supreme Court of the United States
24 recognized that it is permissible to display the Ten Commandments
25 on government property in *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 688
26 (2005).



27 (b) In 2005, the Legislature enacted Section 29-5-105,
28 Mississippi Code of 1972, providing that the Ten Commandments may
29 be displayed on any government property in Mississippi.

30 (c) In 2019, the Supreme Court of the United States
31 further recognized that the Ten Commandments "have historical
32 significance as one of the foundations of our legal system" in
33 *American Legion v. American Humanists Association*, 588 U.S. 29, 53
34 (2019). The Court also ruled that the Ten Commandments represent
35 a "common cultural heritage" and that displaying them on public
36 property may have "multiple purposes," such as "historical
37 significance." *Id.* at 54.

38 (d) Recognizing the historical role of the Ten
39 Commandments accords with our nation's history and faithfully
40 reflects the understanding of the founders of our nation with
41 respect to the necessity of civic morality to a functional
42 self-government.

43 (e) Including the Ten Commandments in the education of
44 our children is part of our state and national history, culture
45 and tradition.

46 (f) The text of the Ten Commandments set forth in
47 Section 2 of this act is identical to the text of the Ten
48 Commandments monument that was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Van*
49 *Orden v. Perry*.

50 (g) The Mayflower Compact of 1620 was America's first
51 written constitution and made a covenant with Almighty God to



52 "form a civil body politic." This was the first purely American
53 document of self-government and affirmed the link between civil
54 society and God.

55 (h) The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided a method
56 of admitting new states to the Union from the territory as the
57 country expanded to the Pacific. The ordinance "extended the
58 fundamental principles of civil and religious liberty" to the
59 territories and stated, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being
60 necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools
61 and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

62 (i) It is the Legislature's intent to apply the
63 decision set forth by the Supreme Court in *Van Orden v. Perry* to
64 continue this rich tradition and ensure that the students in our
65 public schools may understand and appreciate the foundational
66 documents of our state and national government.

67 (j) The Supreme Court of the United States acknowledged
68 that the Ten Commandments may be displayed on local government
69 property when a private donation is made for the purchase of the
70 historical monument. *Pleasant Grove City, Utah v. Summan*, 555
71 U.S. 460 (2006).

72 (k) It is the intention of the Legislature that this
73 section not create an unfunded mandate on any public school
74 governing authority. School boards are encouraged to use
75 documents that are printed and made available to the schools free
76 of charge.



SECTION 2.

(1) For purposes of this section, the following words or phrases shall have the meanings ascribed herein unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

(a) "School" means any public school district, public charter school, agricultural high school, the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind, the Mississippi School of the Arts, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, and any nonpublic school which receives state funds.

(b) "Postsecondary educational institution" means any public university, community college or nonpublic university or college which receives state funds.

(c) "Poster" means a large printed sheet or framed document.

(2) No later than January 1, 2026, each school and each postsecondary educational institution shall display a historical poster or posters that substantially comply with the requirements of subsection (3) of this section in a conspicuous place in each educational building it uses and in each classroom in each school under its jurisdiction.

(3) The nature of the historical poster or posters shall be determined by each school governing authority, with a minimum requirement that the Ten Commandments, the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence be displayed on a poster or posters measuring at least sixteen (16) inches by twenty (20) inches.



(a) The text of the Ten Commandments shall be printed in a large, easily readable font. The text shall read as follows:

"The Ten Commandments

I AM the LORD thy God.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven images.

Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon

the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."

(b) The Ten Commandments shall be displayed with a historical context statement as follows:

"The History of the Ten Commandments in American Public Education

The Ten Commandments were a prominent part of American public education for almost three centuries. Around the year 1688, *The New England Primer* became the first published American textbook and was the equivalent of a first-grade reader. *The New England Primer* was used in public schools throughout the United States for



more than one hundred fifty (150) years to teach Americans to read and contained more than forty (40) questions about the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments were also included in public school textbooks published by educator William McGuffey, a noted university president and professor. A version of his famous *McGuffey Readers* was written in the early 1800s and became one of the more popular textbooks in the history of American education, selling more than one hundred million (100,000,000) copies. Copies of the *McGuffey Readers* are still available today.

The Ten Commandments also appeared in textbooks published by Noah Webster, which were widely used in American public schools along with America's first comprehensive dictionary, which Webster also published. His textbook, *The American Spelling Book*, contained the Ten Commandments and sold more than one hundred million copies (100,000,000) for use by public school children all across the nation and was still available for use in American public schools in the year 1975."

(c) Schools and postsecondary educational institutions shall also display the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence, along with the Ten Commandments, in a large, easily readable font.

(d) In addition, schools and postsecondary educational institutions shall display, in a large, easily readable font, a collection of historical, geographical and cultural facts about



the State of Mississippi, to be supplied by the State Department of Education.

(4) This section shall not require the governing authority of a school or postsecondary educational institution to spend its funds to purchase displays. In order to fund the displays free of charge, the governing authority may accept donated displays or donated funds to purchase the displays.

(5) (a) The State Board of Education shall adopt rules and regulations in accordance with the Mississippi Administrative Procedure Law to ensure the proper implementation of this section.

(b) The State Department of Education shall identify appropriate resources for compliance with this section that are free of charge. Once identified, the department shall list the free resources on its website.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2025.

