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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 456 Session of  
2023

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INTRODUCED BY STAMBAUGH, STAATS, HAMM, JAMES, M. MACKENZIE,  
R. MACKENZIE, KAUFFMAN, BURNS, PICKETT, ZIMMERMAN, ROWE,  
BOROWICZ, WATRO AND LEADBETER, MARCH 16, 2023

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MARCH 16, 2023

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AN ACT

1 Providing for the display of the national motto "In God We  
2 Trust" in classrooms and other areas in public school  
3 buildings.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Short title.

7 This act shall be known and may be cited as the National  
8 Motto Display Act.

9 Section 2. Legislative findings and declarations.

10 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

11 (1) The motto "In God We Trust" is part of the history  
12 and heritage of the United States. On April 22, 2014, we  
13 celebrated the 150th anniversary of our national motto "In  
14 God We Trust" on our coins. Although this phrase was not  
15 officially established as our national motto until a law was  
16 passed by the 84th Congress and approved by President  
17 Eisenhower, it was first introduced to the nation by Francis  
18 Scott Key in 1814 as words that would be included in our

1 national anthem.

2 (2) It was a Pennsylvanian, however, that installed  
3 those words on our coins. James Pollock from Milton, became  
4 our 13th Governor serving from 1855 to 1858. He was known as  
5 "The Great Christian Governor." Prior to Pollock's term as  
6 Governor and as one of the original trustees when The  
7 Pennsylvania State University became a charter, he served as  
8 a member of the Congress of the United States and became  
9 friends with then congressman, Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln  
10 became president, he appointed Pollock director of the United  
11 States Mint.

12 (3) Pollock suggested the motto "In God We Trust" be  
13 featured on all United States currency. This practice first  
14 occurred in April of 1864 when Congress approved the use of  
15 the motto on United States two-cent pieces. Since then, the  
16 motto has been inscribed on most denominations of coins in an  
17 uninterrupted period of time extending from 1916 to the  
18 present.

19 (4) In 1956, the Congress of the United States adopted  
20 the motto "In God We Trust" as the national motto. It is  
21 currently codified at 36 U.S.C. § 302 (relating to national  
22 motto). Since 1957, the United States Bureau of Engraving and  
23 Printing has gradually incorporated the motto in the design  
24 on the reverse of all paper currency.

25 (5) On July 24, 2000, the United States House of  
26 Representatives, along with the concurrence of the Senate,  
27 unanimously resolved to encourage the display of the national  
28 motto of the United States in public buildings throughout the  
29 nation.

30 (6) To increase student understanding of and familiarity

1 with American historical documents, historically important  
2 excerpts from or copies of the documents should be  
3 prominently displayed in public school buildings.

4 (7) The Federal 5th, 9th and 10th Circuit Courts have  
5 ruled that displaying the national motto passes  
6 constitutional muster so long as the purpose of the display  
7 is to advance or endorse the national motto rather than a  
8 particular religious belief or practice.

9 Section 3. Definitions.

10 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall  
11 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
12 context clearly indicates otherwise:

13 "School entity." A school district, joint school district,  
14 area career and technical school, intermediate unit, charter  
15 school, regional charter school or cyber charter school.

16 Section 4. Display of motto.

17 (a) Governing board.--The governing board of each school  
18 entity in this Commonwealth may display the motto "In God We  
19 Trust," which is declared in 36 U.S.C. § 302 (relating to  
20 national motto) to be the national motto of the United States,  
21 in each school building.

22 (b) Form.--The display of the motto "In God We Trust" may  
23 take the form of, but is not limited to, a mounted plaque or may  
24 include artwork as a result of a student contest that may be  
25 prominently displayed in each school building.

26 (c) Duties of secretary.--The Secretary of Education shall,  
27 within 15 days of the effective date of this subsection and  
28 every five years thereafter, provide each school entity with  
29 notification of the provisions of subsections (a) and (b) and  
30 recommendations for promotion of the national motto in

1 accordance with this section.

2 Section 5. Effective date.

3 This act shall take effect in 60 days.