
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 549 Session of
2015

INTRODUCED BY KAUFFMAN, BAKER, KRIEGER, BLOOM, HEFFLEY, SACCONI,
KORTZ, BARRAR, KNOWLES, RAPP, GROVE, TALLMAN, CUTLER, GILLEN,
MCGINNIS, METCALFE, SAYLOR, EVERETT, GABLER, LAWRENCE,
TRUITT, BENNINGHOFF AND MOUL, FEBRUARY 23, 2015

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 23, 2015

AN ACT

1 Providing for voluntary student expression of religious
2 viewpoints in public schools; requiring public school
3 districts to allow religious expression in class assignments,
4 to provide students with the freedom to organize religious
5 groups and activities and to provide a limited public forum
6 for student speakers at nongraduation and graduation events;
7 and providing for a model policy for voluntary religious
8 expression in public schools.

9 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
10 hereby enacts as follows:

11 Section 1. Short title.

12 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Student
13 Religious Liberties Act.

14 Section 2. Definitions.

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

18 "Department." The Department of Education of the
19 Commonwealth.

20 "Public school entity." Any of the following:

1 (1) A school district, as defined in section 102 of the
2 act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public
3 School Code of 1949.

4 (2) A charter school, cyber charter school or regional
5 charter school, as defined in section 1703-A of the Public
6 School Code of 1949.

7 (3) An intermediate unit, as established pursuant to
8 Article IX-A of the Public School Code of 1949.

9 (4) An area vocational-technical school, as established
10 pursuant to Article XVIII of the Public School Code of 1949.
11 Section 3. Student expression.

12 (a) Prohibition.--A public school entity may not
13 discriminate against a student or parent on the basis of a
14 religious viewpoint or religious expression.

15 (b) Treatment.--A public school entity shall treat a
16 student's voluntary expression of a religious viewpoint on an
17 otherwise permissible subject in the same manner that the public
18 school entity treats a student's voluntary expression of a
19 secular or other viewpoint on an otherwise permissible subject
20 and may not discriminate against the student based on a
21 religious viewpoint expressed by the student on an otherwise
22 permissible subject.

23 Section 4. Religious expression in a class assignment.

24 (a) Expression permitted.--A student may express the
25 student's beliefs about religion in homework, artwork and other
26 written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on
27 the religious content of the submission. Homework and
28 assignments must be judged by ordinary academic standards of
29 substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical
30 concerns identified by the public school entity.

1 (b) Penalty or reward prohibited.--

2 (1) A public school entity shall not penalize or reward
3 a student based on the religious content of the student's
4 work.

5 (2) If an assignment requires a student's viewpoint to
6 be expressed in coursework, artwork or written or oral
7 assignments, a public school entity shall not penalize or
8 reward a student on the basis of religious content or a
9 religious viewpoint. In evaluating an assignment under this
10 paragraph, a public school entity shall evaluate a student's
11 academic work that expresses a religious viewpoint based on
12 ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance to the
13 course curriculum or requirements of the coursework or
14 assignment.

15 Section 5. Freedom to organize a religious group and activity.

16 (a) Time.--A student enrolled in a public school entity may
17 pray or engage in a religious activity or religious expression
18 before, during and after the school day in the same manner and
19 to the same extent as a student may engage in secular activities
20 or expression.

21 (b) Organization.--A student enrolled in a public school
22 entity may organize a prayer group, religious club or other
23 religious gathering before, during and after the school day to
24 the same extent as a student is permitted to organize a secular,
25 noncurricular student group or activity.

26 (c) Access.--A public school entity shall provide a
27 religious group the same access to a school facility for
28 assembling as the public school entity provides to secular,
29 noncurricular groups without discrimination based on the
30 religious content of the students' expression or religious

1 viewpoint of the group.

2 (d) Advertisement.--If a public school entity permits a
3 student group that meets for secular activities to use school
4 premises, property or services to advertise or announce group
5 meetings, the public school entity shall permit a student group
6 that meets for prayer or other religious speech the same access
7 to school premises, property or services to advertise or
8 announce group meetings.

9 (e) Disclaimer.--A public school entity may disclaim school
10 sponsorship of noncurricular groups and events in a manner that
11 neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to engage in
12 prayer or religious speech.

13 (f) Clothing.--A student enrolled in a public school entity
14 may wear clothing, accessories and jewelry that display a
15 religious message or religious symbol in the same manner and to
16 the same extent that a student may wear clothing, accessories
17 and jewelry that display a secular message or symbol.

18 Section 6. Limited public forum.

19 (a) General rule.--A public school entity shall establish a
20 limited public forum for student speakers at any school event at
21 which a student will publicly speak and shall:

22 (1) Not discriminate against a student's voluntary
23 expression of a religious viewpoint on an otherwise
24 permissible subject.

25 (2) Develop and utilize a method, based on neutral
26 criteria, for the selection of one or more student speakers
27 at school events including, but not limited to, a graduation
28 ceremony.

29 (3) Ensure that a student speaker does not engage in
30 obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd or indecent speech.

1 (4) State in writing, orally or both, that the student's
2 speech does not reflect the endorsement, sponsorship,
3 position or expression of the public school entity. The
4 disclaimer required under this paragraph shall be provided at
5 graduation ceremonies and at any other event in which a
6 student speaks publicly.

7 (b) Exclusion prohibited.--A public school entity may not
8 exclude student expression on an otherwise permissible subject
9 from the limited public forum because the student expresses a
10 religious viewpoint.

11 Section 7. Policy.

12 (a) Model policy.--Not later than October 1, 2015, the
13 department shall develop a model policy for public school
14 entities that is consistent with this act. The department shall
15 post the model policy on its publicly accessible Internet
16 website.

17 (b) Public school entity policy.--

18 (1) Not later than January 1, 2016, each public school
19 entity shall:

20 (i) adopt the model policy developed by the
21 department pursuant to subsection (a);

22 (ii) develop and adopt its own policy related to
23 student religious liberties that is consistent with this
24 act; or

25 (iii) amend an existing policy related to student
26 religious liberties in a manner consistent with this act.

27 (2) The public school entity shall post the policy
28 required under paragraph (1) on its publicly accessible
29 Internet website, if available, in every classroom and at a
30 prominent location within each school building where such

1 policies are usually posted.

2 Section 8. Limitations.

3 (a) Participation not required.--This act shall not be
4 construed to authorize this Commonwealth or any public school
5 entity to do any of the following:

6 (1) Require an individual to participate in prayer or in
7 any other religious activity.

8 (2) Violate the constitutional rights of an individual.

9 (b) Authority preserved.--This act shall not be construed to
10 limit the authority of a public school entity to do any of the
11 following:

12 (1) Maintain order and discipline on its school campus
13 in a manner that does not discriminate against a student's
14 religious viewpoint or the religious content of a student's
15 expression.

16 (2) Protect the safety of a student, employee or visitor
17 of a school.

18 (3) Adopt and enforce policies and procedures regarding
19 student speech at school if the policies and procedures do
20 not violate the rights of students under the Constitution of
21 the United States and the laws of this Commonwealth.

22 Section 9. Effective date.

23 This act shall take effect July 1, 2015, or immediately,
24 whichever is later.