

SUBJECT: Requiring public schools to display the Ten Commandments

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 10 ayes — Buckley, Allison, Cunningham, Dutton, Cody Harris, Harrison, Hefner, K. King, Longoria, Schaefer

3 nays — Allen, Hinojosa, Talarico

SENATE VOTE: On final passage (April 20) — 17 - 12

WITNESSES: For — Matt Krause, First Liberty Institute; Mary Elizabeth Castle, Texas Values; Timothy Barton, WallBuilders (*Registered, but did not testify*: Richard Vega, CT Church/At His Feet Ministries; Margarita Avelar, Debra Briley, Brandon Burden, Brandy Decker, Rodney Landry, North Texas Conservatives; and 23 individuals)

Against — David Albert, Texas American Federation of Teachers and Austin Community College-American Federation of Teachers; Carisa Lopez, Texas Freedom Network; Joshua Houston, Texas Impact; and nine individuals (*Registered, but did not testify*: Brian Klosterboer, ACLU of Texas; Courtney Toretto, Anti-Defamation League; Garrett Chase, ASHwell; Tricia Cave, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Maggie Stern, Children's Defense Fund - Texas; Harold Oliver, Democrats for Education Reform; Jamila English, Emgage; Sofia Sepulveda, Equality Texas; Chloe Latham Sikes, Intercultural Development Research Association; Eleanor Porras, Kingwood Area Democrats; Lesley Rivas, Mexican American School Boards Association; James Jackson, OUTreach Denton, PRIDENTON; Lauren Wolf, Pflugerville Area Democrats; Max Casero, Prism Integrated Health; Corinna Whiteaker-Lewis, San Gabriel Unitarian Universalist Fellowship; Alejandro Pena, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Marti Bier, Alex Flucke, Adriano Perez, Emily Witt, Texas Freedom Network; LyAnna Johnson, Texas Impact; Suzi Kennon, Texas PTA; Elaina Fowler, Texas State Teachers Association; Heather Malkawi, Erin Walter, Sarah Berel-Harrop, Texas Unitarian Universalist Ministry; Cynthia Van Maanen,

Travis County Democratic Party; Nicole Ma, Quynh-Huong Nguyen, Sarah Syed, Steven Wu, Woori Juntos; and 347 individuals)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eric Marin, TEA)

BACKGROUND: Some have suggested that displaying the Ten Commandments in Texas public elementary and secondary schools would remind students of a foundation of American and Texas law.

DIGEST: SB 1515 would require public elementary and secondary schools to display a durable poster or framed copy of the Ten Commandments in a conspicuous place in each classroom.

A poster or framed copy of the Ten Commandments would be required to:

- include the text of the Ten Commandments in a legible size and type face that could be reasonably viewed from anywhere in the classroom; and
- be at least 16 inches wide and 20 inches tall.

A poster or framed copy of the Ten Commandments would be required to contain certain text specified in the bill.

SB 1515 would require any public elementary or secondary school without a poster or framed copy of the Ten Commandments in each classroom to accept and display any privately donated poster or copy that met the specified requirements and did not contain any additional content. If a public elementary or secondary school had a poster or framed copy that did not meet the specified requirements, the school would be authorized to use public funds or accept a private donation to replace the poster or copy with a version that met the requirements.

The bill also would require public elementary and secondary schools to offer as a donation to another public elementary or secondary school any unneeded copies of the Ten Commandments that met the specified requirements.

The bill would apply beginning with the 2023-2024 school year.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2023.