

HCS HJR 55 -- RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN PUBLIC PLACES

SPONSOR: Jones, 89 (McGhee)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Special Committee on General Laws by a vote of 7 to 1.

Upon voter approval, this proposed constitutional amendment guarantees a citizen's First Amendment right to pray and worship in all public areas including schools as long as the activities are voluntary and subject to the same rules and regulations that apply to all other types of speech.

The amendment reaffirms a citizen's right to choose any religion or no religion at all by prohibiting both the establishment of an official state religion and any state coercion or endorsement of religion through practices as composing official state prayers.

Public schools receiving state funds are required to display the text of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the United States in a conspicuous and legible manner.

The amendment also reaffirms the right of employees and elected officials of the State of Missouri to pray on government premises and public property. The amendment ensures the General Assembly and other political subdivisions the right to have ministers and clergymen offer prayers or invocations at meetings or sessions of the General Assembly or other governing bodies.

FISCAL NOTE: No impact on state funds in FY 2009, FY 2010, and FY 2011.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill assures the religious freedoms of all citizens who pray in public places, including schools, public property, and government buildings. The bill also amplifies the rights and restrictions of the free exercise clause and establishment clause by requiring public schools to display the text of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and ensures Missouri courts cannot forbid the practice of religion of Missouri citizens.

Testifying for the bill were Representative McGhee; Missouri Family Network; Missouri Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission; and Missouri Family Policy Council.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.