

SECOND REGULAR SESSION

HOUSE BILL NO. 2682

103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVE CHAPPELL.

6425H.01I

JOSEPH ENGLER, Chief Clerk

AN ACT

To repeal section 160.2500, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof one new section relating to personal expression at public schools.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the state of Missouri, as follows:

Section A. Section 160.2500, RSMo, is repealed and one new section enacted in lieu
2 thereof, to be known as section 160.2500, to read as follows:

160.2500. 1. This section shall be known and may be cited as the "Missouri [Student
2 Religious Liberties] Safeguarding Personal Expression at K-12 Schools (SPEAKS) Act".

3 2. A public school district shall not discriminate against any person on the basis of a
4 religious, **political, or ideological** viewpoint or religious, **political, or ideological**
5 expression. A school district shall treat a student's voluntary expression of a religious,
6 **political, or ideological** viewpoint, if any, on an otherwise permissible subject in the same
7 manner the district treats a student's voluntary expression of a secular or other viewpoint on
8 an otherwise permissible subject and shall not discriminate against the student based on a
9 religious, **political, or ideological** viewpoint expressed by the student on an otherwise
10 permissible subject.

11 3. Students **in public schools** may express their **religious, political, or ideological**
12 beliefs **[about religion]** in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free
13 from discrimination based on the religious, **political, or ideological** content of their
14 submissions. Homework and classroom assignments shall be judged by ordinary academic
15 standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns
16 identified by the school district. Students shall not be penalized or rewarded on account of
17 the religious, **political, or ideological** content of their work. If an assignment requires a

EXPLANATION — Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **[thus]** in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in **bold-face** type in the above bill is proposed language.

18 student's viewpoints to be expressed in course work, artwork or other written or oral
19 assignments, a public school district shall not penalize or reward a student on the basis of
20 religious, **political, or ideological** content or a religious, **political, or ideological** viewpoint.
21 In such an assignment, a student's academic work that expresses a religious, **political, or**
22 **ideological** viewpoint shall be evaluated based on ordinary academic standards of substance
23 and relevance to the course curriculum or requirements of the course work or assignment.

24 4. Students in public schools may pray or engage in religious, **political, or**
25 **ideological** activities or religious, **political, or ideological** expression before, during and after
26 the school day in the same manner and to the same extent that students may engage in
27 ~~nonreligious~~ **other** activities or expression, provided that such religious, **political, or**
28 **ideological** expression or religious, **political, or ideological** activities are not disruptive of
29 scheduled instructional time or other educational activities and do not impede access to
30 school facilities or mobility on school premises. Students may organize prayer groups[;];
31 religious, **political, or ideological** clubs[;]; or other religious, **political, or ideological**
32 gatherings before, during and after school to the same extent that students are permitted to
33 organize other noncurricular student activities and groups. Religious, **political, or**
34 **ideological** groups shall be given the same access to school facilities for assembling as is
35 given to other noncurricular groups without discrimination based on the religious, **political,**
36 **or ideological** content of the student's expression. If student groups that meet for
37 nonreligious activities are permitted to advertise or announce meetings of the groups, the
38 school district shall not discriminate against groups that meet for prayer or other religious,
39 **political, or ideological** speech. A school district may disclaim school sponsorship of
40 noncurricular groups and events in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that
41 meet to engage in prayer or religious, **political, or ideological** speech.

42 5. **A public school shall not discriminate against a student club because of:**

43 (1) **The religious, political, or ideological viewpoints expressed by the students or**
44 **the organization; or**

45 (2) **Any requirement that the leaders or members of the club affirm and adhere**
46 **to the organization's sincerely held beliefs, comply with the organization's standards of**
47 **conduct, or further the organization's mission or purpose, as defined by the student**
48 **organization.**

49 6. Students in public schools may wear clothing, accessories and jewelry that display
50 religious, **political, or ideological** messages or religious, **political, or ideological** symbols in
51 the same manner and to the same extent that other types of clothing, accessories and jewelry
52 that display messages or symbols are permitted, as specified in subsection 7 of section
53 167.166.

54 [6.] 7. (1) To ensure that the school district does not discriminate against a student's
55 publicly stated voluntary expression of a religious, **political, or ideological** viewpoint, if any,
56 and to eliminate any actual or perceived affirmative school sponsorship or attribution to the
57 district of a student's expression of a religious, **political, or ideological** viewpoint, if any, a
58 school district shall adopt a policy, which shall include the establishment of a limited public
59 forum for student speakers at all school events at which a student is to publicly speak. The
60 policy regarding the limited public forum shall also require the school district to:

61 (a) Provide the forum in a manner that does not discriminate against a student's
62 voluntary expression of a religious, **political, or ideological** viewpoint, if any, on an
63 otherwise permissible subject;

64 (b) Provide a method, based on neutral criteria, for the selection of student speakers at
65 school events and graduation ceremonies;

66 (c) Ensure that a student speaker does not engage in obscene, vulgar, offensively lewd
67 or indecent speech; and

68 (d) State, in writing, orally, or both, that the student's speech does not reflect the
69 endorsement, sponsorship, position or expression of the district.

70 (2) The school district disclaimer required by paragraph (d) of subdivision (1) of this
71 subsection shall be provided at all graduation ceremonies. The school district shall also
72 continue to provide the disclaimer at any other event in which a student speaks publicly for as
73 long as a need exists to dispel confusion over the district's nonsponsorship of the student's
74 speech.

75 (3) Student expression on an otherwise permissible subject shall not be excluded from
76 the limited public forum because the subject is expressed from a religious, **political, or**
77 **ideological** viewpoint.

78 (4) All public school districts shall adopt and implement a local policy regarding a
79 limited public forum and voluntary student expression of religious, **political, or ideological**
80 viewpoints.

81 [7.] 8. The provisions of this section shall not be construed to authorize this state or
82 any of its political subdivisions to either:

83 (1) Require any person to participate in prayer or in any other religious, **political, or**
84 **ideological** activity; or

85 (2) Violate the constitutional rights of any person.

86 [8.] 9. The provisions of this section shall not be construed to limit the authority of
87 any public school to do any of the following:

88 (1) Maintain order and discipline on the campus of the public school in a content and
89 viewpoint neutral manner;

90 (2) Protect the safety of students, employees and visitors of the public school;

91 (3) Adopt and enforce policies and procedures regarding student speech at school,
92 provided that the policies and procedures do not violate the rights of students as guaranteed
93 by law.

94 10. The provisions of this section shall not be construed to limit the authority of
95 any public school to prohibit, limit, or restrict any of the following:

96 (1) Expression that the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States
97 does not protect, such as true threats, obscenity, or expression directed to provoke
98 imminent lawless actions and likely to produce such actions;

99 (2) Expression that is unwelcome and so severe, pervasive, and subjectively and
100 objectively offensive that a student is effectively denied equal access to educational
101 opportunities or benefits provided by the school; or

102 (3) **Conduct that intentionally, materially, and substantially disrupts:**

103 (a) The operations of the school; or

104 (b) The expressive activity of another individual if that activity is occurring in a
105 campus space reserved for that activity under the exclusive use or control of a particular
106 student, group of students, or club.

107 11. Any person or student organization who is harmed by a violation of this
108 section or whose rights under this section are violated shall have a private cause of
109 action against the public school for declaratory and injunctive relief, monetary
110 damages, reasonable attorney's fees and costs, and any other appropriate relief. A
111 person or student organization shall be required to bring suit for violation of this section
112 not later than two years after the day the cause of action accrues. For purposes of
113 calculating the two-year limitation period, each day that the violation persists and each
114 day that a policy in violation of this section remains in effect shall constitute a new day
115 that the cause of action has accrued. If a court should find a violation of this section, it
116 shall issue an award to the prevailing party of at least five thousand dollars.

117 12. Any person or student organization aggrieved by a violation of this section
118 may assert such violation as a defense or counterclaim in any disciplinary action or in
119 any civil or administrative proceeding brought against such person or student
120 organization.

121 13. Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit any other remedies
122 available to any student or student organization.

123 14. The state waives immunity under the Eleventh Amendment to the United
124 States Constitution and consents to be sued in federal court for claims arising under this
125 section. A public school that violates this section is not immune from suit or liability for
126 the violation.

127 **[9.] 15.** The provisions of section 1.140 are applicable to this section.

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