

SECOND REGULAR SESSION  
HOUSE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR  
**HOUSE BILL NO. 2682**  
**103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

6425H.03C

JOSEPH ENGLER, Chief Clerk

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**AN ACT**

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

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*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Section A. Section 160.2500, RSMo, is repealed and one new section enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as section 160.2500, to read as follows: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 Religious Liberties]~~ **Safeguarding Personal Expression at K-12 Schools (SPEAKS)** Act".

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

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

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.

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 and consents to be sued in federal court for**  
124 **claims relating to public schools arising under this section. A public school that violates**  
125 **this section is not immune from suit or liability for the violation.**

126        ~~[9-]~~ **15.** The provisions of section 1.140 are applicable to this section.

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