

HCS HB 2682 -- PERSONAL EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SPONSOR: Chappell

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on General Laws by a vote of 6 to 3. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Legislative by a vote of 8 to 2.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2682.

This bill renames the "Missouri Student Religious Liberties Act" to the "Missouri Safeguarding Personal Expression at K-12 Schools (SPEAKS) Act". The Act adds political and ideological expression to the current protections for public school students' religious expression.

The bill additionally prohibits discrimination against student clubs on the basis of their religious, political, or ideological viewpoints or any requirement that the members of the club adhere to the club's sincerely held beliefs, comply with the club's conduct standards, or further the club's mission, as such mission is defined by the club.

This bill must not be construed to limit school districts' ability to restrict speech that is not protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States; speech that is so offensive that a student is effectively denied equal access to educational opportunities; or conduct that intentionally, materially, and substantially disrupts school operations or the expressive activity of another individual in a campus space exclusively reserved for such activity.

Any person or student organization harmed by a violation of this Act will have a private cause of action against the school, as specified in the Act. Any person or student organization aggrieved by a violation of this Act may assert such violation as a defense or counterclaim in any disciplinary action or in any civil or administrative proceeding. The State waives immunity under Federal law and consents to be sued in Federal court for claims arising under this Act.

This bill is similar to SB 909 (2026).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that students should have the ability to speak their minds about matters that are of a political nature. Such protections already exist for religious speech, and if students want to form a politically-inclined club, this bill would allow them to do so. Supporters further state that many of our youth have lost the ability to speak to each other in a civil manner, and if children are exposed to many different viewpoints, they might learn how to get along at a much younger age.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Chappell; Walter E Hayes; 1st Amendment Partnership; Americans For Prosperity; Alliance Defending Freedom Action; and Arnie C. Dienoff.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill would end up in costly litigation for schools that try and decide which political groups should be allowed to operate on campus, or when the school tries to decide when the group has become disruptive and intimidating to others. Opponents further state that the provisions of this bill improperly conflate religious freedoms, which have long been cherished, with political or ideological ideas, which are far more nebulous and therefore held less dear.

Testifying in person against the bill were Missouri NEA; Sharon Geuea Jones, PROMO; and MO State Conference NAACP.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that bullying and harassment are not protected speech, which means that schools already have the ability to properly handle these occurrences. If this bill is passed, some schools will likely require more training for teachers and administrators on how to handle the increased responsibility.

Testifying in person on the bill was Sara Beth Nolan, Alliance Defending Freedom.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.