

**HB178 ENGROSSED**



1 HB178

2 5VU8763-2

3 By Representatives *Gidley, Harrison, Lamb, Butler, Estes,*  
4 *Stadthagen, DuBose, Rigsby, Simpson, Paschal, Hulsey, Shirey,*  
5 *Kiel, Robertson, Rehm, Yarbrough, Givens, Fidler, Woods,*  
6 *Shedd, Shaver, Brinyark*

7 RFD: Education Policy

8 First Read: 05-Feb-25



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A BILL  
TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

Relating to public K-12 schools; to provide legislative findings; to require each local board of education to display the Ten Commandments and certain other documents related to the formation of this nation, subject to the availability of donations; to provide for the use of donations to comply with the display requirement; to authorize the State Board of Education to adopt rules.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

Section 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The Ten Commandments are a key part of the Judeo-Christian religious and moral tradition that shaped Western Civilization and ultimately the founding of the United States. In particular, because they include what John Quincy Adams described as both "civil and municipal" provisions as well as "moral and religious" provisions, the Ten Commandments have historical significance as one of the foundations of our legal system. Teaching students about the Ten Commandments promotes historical understanding and helps to foster a common cultural heritage and awareness.



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29 (b) Documents created to shape civil society during the  
30 founding era of this nation include direct and indirect  
31 references to God and religion. These documents include the  
32 following:

33 (1) The Mayflower Compact of 1620, America's first  
34 written constitution, was a covenant made among the pilgrims  
35 with "Almighty God" to "form a civil body politic." The  
36 Mayflower Compact was the first purely American document of  
37 self-government and affirmed the link between civil society  
38 and God.

39 (2) The Declaration of Independence (1776) described  
40 all men as being "created equal" and "endowed by their Creator  
41 with certain unalienable Rights."

42 (3) The United States Constitution (1787) stated in its  
43 preamble that one of its purposes was to secure "the Blessings  
44 of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity" and closed with a  
45 reference to the date of execution as the Seventeenth Day of  
46 September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred  
47 and eighty-seven.

48 (4) The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided a method  
49 of admitting new states to the Union from territories as the  
50 country expanded westward. The Northwest Ordinance "extended  
51 the fundamental principles of civil and religious liberty" to  
52 the territories and stated that "[r]eligion, morality, and  
53 knowledge, being necessary to good government and the  
54 happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall  
55 forever be encouraged."

56 (c) References to God and religion in public documents



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57 and other public contexts did not end at the founding but  
58 rather have occurred throughout our nation's history without  
59 any serious claim that such references violate the  
60 Establishment Clause. Examples include displays associated  
61 with the Ten Commandments in the Supreme Court of the United  
62 States, the Library of Congress, the Ronald Reagan  
63 International Trade Building, and the National Archives.  
64 Public references to God have occurred repeatedly over the  
65 nation's history. No outcry followed Abraham Lincoln's  
66 reference to God in his Gettysburg Address in 1863. Our  
67 coinage has born the phrase, "IN GOD WE TRUST," since 1865.  
68 Prayers have opened our legislative sessions for hundreds of  
69 years. In 1932, Congress adopted our National Anthem and  
70 included in the last verse, "In God is our trust." In 1952,  
71 Congress proclaimed a "National Day of Prayer." In 1954,  
72 Congress added "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. The  
73 display of the Ten Commandments as provided in this act, with  
74 an appropriate context statement and integrated with the  
75 approved public school social studies curriculum, is  
76 consistent with these historical practices and understandings  
77 and, at a minimum, furthers the same interests as the  
78 interests served by these historical practices and  
79 understandings.

80 (d) The 2024 social studies curriculum approved by the  
81 Alabama State Board of Education (Alabama Course of Study:  
82 Social Studies) provides: "Social studies education in Alabama  
83 aims to prepare students to become knowledgeable, engaged, and  
84 responsible citizens in society. Social studies reflects the



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85 achievements, struggles, interactions, and endeavors that have  
86 characterized human society as it has changed over time and  
87 place to shape the world today. The disciplines of social  
88 studies include, but are not limited to: Anthropology,  
89 Archaeology, Civics, Economics, Geography, Government,  
90 History, Philosophy, Psychology, Religion, and Sociology."  
91 Display of the Ten Commandments with an appropriate context  
92 statement is essential to the fulfillment of the mandate of  
93 the State Board of Education in the education of students in  
94 the areas of Civics, Government, History, Philosophy,  
95 Religion, and Sociology.

96 (e) Two generations of Alabama students have attended  
97 public schools in an era governed by the now-abandoned test  
98 articulated in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971), for  
99 compliance with the Establishment Clause of the United States  
100 Constitution. Assuring restoration to the classroom of  
101 historical truths surrounding the founding of our nation,  
102 including those truths that "partake of the religious,"  
103 *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, 597 U.S. 507, 535 (2022), is vital to  
104 remedying the legal error of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* and to securing  
105 a complete education of our students.

106 (f) It is the intent of the Legislature that this act  
107 does not create an unfunded mandate on any public-school  
108 governing authority. Local boards of education are encouraged  
109 to use documents that are printed and made available to the  
110 schools free of charge.

111 Section 2. (a) Beginning January 1, 2026, and subject  
112 to the availability of donated funds or donated displays



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113 pursuant to subsection (c) as determined by the State  
114 Superintendent of Education, each local board of education  
115 shall display a poster or framed document that meets the  
116 requirements of subsection (b) in: (i) an entry way or other  
117 common area in the school, such as the cafeteria or school  
118 library; and (ii) in classrooms where United States history is  
119 routinely taught according to the Alabama Course of Study.

120 (b) The poster or framed document required by  
121 subsection (a) shall meet each of the following requirements:

122 (1) The poster or framed document shall be at least 11  
123 inches by 14 inches in size.

124 (2) The layout and design of the poster or framed  
125 document shall be approved by the State Superintendent of  
126 Education.

127 (3) The poster or framed document shall contain the  
128 following content:

129 Historical Truths: The Ten Commandments and America's  
130 Founding Documents

131 The Ten Commandments are a key part of the  
132 Judeo-Christian religious and moral tradition that shaped  
133 Western Civilization and ultimately the founding of the United  
134 States. There are many versions of the Ten Commandments. The  
135 one that follows is a common translation but not the only  
136 translation.

137 You shall not have other gods before me

138 You shall not make idols

139 You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in  
140 vain



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141 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy  
142 Honor your father and your mother  
143 You shall not kill  
144 You shall not commit adultery  
145 You shall not steal  
146 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor  
147 You shall not covet

148 In 1813, future U.S. President John Quincy Adams wrote  
149 in a letter to his son that, "The Law given from Sinai" - in  
150 other words, the Ten Commandments - "was a civil and municipal  
151 as well as a moral and religious Code." He noted that many of  
152 its provisions "were of universal applications - Laws  
153 essential to the existence of men in Society, and most of  
154 which have been enacted by every Nation which ever possessed  
155 any Code of Law."

156 The Alabama Constitution provides that "no religion  
157 shall be established by law." The purpose of this poster,  
158 however, is simply to acknowledge the historical role of the  
159 Ten Commandments - and the broader Judeo-Christian tradition -  
160 in shaping American civil society.

161 The Mayflower Compact of 1620, America's first written  
162 constitution, contained a "covenant with 'Almighty God'" by  
163 pilgrims to America to "form a civil body politic."

164 The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 "extended the  
165 fundamental principles of civil and religious liberty" to the  
166 western territories becoming states and provided that  
167 "[r]eligion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good  
168 government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means



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169 of education shall forever be encouraged."

170 The Declaration of Independence (1776) described all  
171 men as being "created equal" and acknowledged that they are  
172 "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."

173 The United States Constitution (1787) in its preamble  
174 stated one of its purposes to be securing "the Blessings of  
175 Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

176 (c) This section may not be construed to require a  
177 local board of education to spend its funds to purchase the  
178 displays required by this section. To fund the displays free  
179 of charge, a local board of education may accept donated funds  
180 to purchase the displays or may accept donated displays.

181 (d) The State Department of Education shall identify  
182 appropriate resources for local boards of education to comply  
183 with this section free of charge. Once identified, the  
184 department shall list the free resources on the department's  
185 website.

186 (e) The State Board of Education may adopt rules to  
187 implement this section.

188 Section 3. This act shall become effective on October  
189 1, 2025.





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House of Representatives

Read for the first time and referred .....05-Feb-25  
to the House of Representatives  
committee on Education Policy  
  
Read for the second time and placed .....09-Apr-25  
on the calendar:  
0 amendments  
  
Read for the third time and passed .....17-Apr-25  
as amended  
Yeas 81  
Nays 11  
Abstains 7

John Treadwell  
Clerk