

1 STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2 1st Session of the 60th Legislature (2025)

3 SENATE BILL 793

By: Jett

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5
6 AS INTRODUCED

7 An Act relating to education; stating legislative
8 intent; requiring school district boards of education
9 and charter school governing boards to display the
10 Ten Commandments in each classroom by certain date;
11 requiring display to be certain minimum size;
12 requiring focus on certain text; providing text of
13 display; requiring display to include certain context
14 statement; allowing additional displays; directing
15 displays to be free of charge; directing the State
16 Department of Education to identify and publish
17 certain resources; providing for promulgation of
18 rules; requiring certain institutions of higher
19 education to display the Ten Commandments in each
20 classroom by certain date; requiring display to be
21 certain minimum size; requiring focus on certain
22 text; directing displays to be free of charge;
23 providing for promulgation of rules; providing for
24 noncodification; providing for codification;
25 providing an effective date; and declaring an
26 emergency.

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29 BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

30 SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law not to be
31 codified in the Oklahoma Statutes reads as follows:

32 The Legislature finds and declares the following:
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35

1 1. In 2005, the United States Supreme Court recognized that it
2 is permissible to display the Ten Commandments on government
3 property in *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 688 (2005);

4 2. Section 2101 of Title 25 of the Oklahoma Statutes authorizes
5 the display of the Ten Commandments in the public buildings or
6 grounds of every county, municipality, city, town, school, or any
7 other political subdivision;

8 3. In 2019, the United States Supreme Court further recognized
9 that the Ten Commandments "have historical significance as one of
10 the foundations of our legal system..." in *American Legion v. American*
11 *Humanists Association*, 588 U.S. 29, 53 (2019), and the Court also
12 ruled that the displaying of the Ten Commandments on public property
13 may have "multiple purposes" such as "historical significance" and
14 represent a "common cultural heritage." *id.*, 588 U.S. at 54;

15 4. Recognizing the historical role of the Ten Commandments
16 accords with the history of the United States and faithfully
17 reflects the understanding of the nation's founders with respect to
18 the necessity of civic morality to a functional self-government.
19 History records that James Madison, the fourth president of the
20 United States, stated that "(w)e have staked the whole future of our
21 new nation...upon the capacity of each of ourselves to govern
22 according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments";

1 5. Including the Ten Commandments in the education of the
2 children of this state is part of the history, culture, and
3 tradition of this state and the United States;

4 6. The text of the Ten Commandments set forth in paragraph 2 of
5 subsection A of Section 2 of this act is identical to the text of
6 the Ten Commandments monument that was upheld by the United States
7 Supreme Court in *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 688 (2005);

8 7. The Mayflower Compact of 1620 was America's first written
9 constitution and made a covenant with God to "form a civil body
10 politic." This was the first purely American document of self-
11 government and affirmed the link between civil society and God;

12 8. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided a method of
13 admitting new states to the Union from the territory as the country
14 expanded to the Pacific Ocean. The Ordinance "extended the
15 fundamental principles of civil and religious liberty" to the
16 territories and stated that "(r)eligion, morality, and knowledge,
17 being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind,
18 schools, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged";

19 9. It is the intent of the Legislature to apply the decision
20 set forth by the United States Supreme Court in *Van Orden v. Perry*,
21 *id.*, to continue the rich tradition and ensure that students in
22 public schools in this state may understand and appreciate the
23 foundational documents of the government of this state and the
24 United States;

1 10. The United States Supreme Court acknowledged that the Ten
2 Commandments may be displayed on local government property when a
3 private donation is made for the purchase of the historical
4 monument, Pleasant Grove City, Utah v. Summum, 555 U.S. 460 (2009);
5 and

6 11. It is the intent of the Legislature that the provisions of
7 this section shall not create an unfunded mandate on any school
8 district board of education or charter school governing board. The
9 boards of education and governing boards are encouraged to use
10 documents that are printed and made available to schools free of
11 charge.

12 SECTION 2. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified
13 in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 24-106.2 of Title 70, unless
14 there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

15 A. 1. No later than January 1, 2026, each school district
16 board of education and charter school governing board shall display
17 the Ten Commandments in each classroom in each school under its
18 jurisdiction. The nature of the display shall be determined by each
19 board of education or governing board with a minimum requirement
20 that the Ten Commandments shall be displayed on a poster or framed
21 document that is at least eleven (11) inches by fourteen (14)
22 inches. The text of the Ten Commandments shall be the central focus
23 of the poster or framed document and shall be printed in a large,
24 easily readable font.

1 2. The text shall read as follows:

2 "The Ten Commandments

3 I AM the Lord thy God.

4 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

5 Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven images.

6 Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.

7 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

8 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the

9 land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

10 Thou shalt not kill.

11 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

12 Thou shalt not steal.

13 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

14 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

15 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor

16 his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy

17 neighbor's."

18 3. The Ten Commandments shall be displayed with a context
19 statement as follows:

20 "The History of the Ten Commandments in American Public Education:

21 The Ten Commandments were a prominent part of American public
22 education for almost three centuries. Around the year 1688, The New
23 England Primer became the first published American textbook and was
24 the equivalent of a first grade reader. The New England Primer was
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1 used in public schools throughout the United States for more than
2 one hundred fifty years to teach Americans to read and contained
3 more than forty questions about the Ten Commandments.

4 The Ten Commandments were also included in public school textbooks
5 published by educator William McGuffey, a noted university president
6 and professor. A version of his famous McGuffey Readers was written
7 in the early 1800s and became one of the most popular textbooks in
8 the history of American education, selling more than one hundred
9 million copies. Copies of the McGuffey Readers are still available
10 today.

11 The Ten Commandments also appeared in textbooks published by Noah
12 Webster and which were widely used in American public schools along
13 with America's first comprehensive dictionary that Webster also
14 published. His textbook, The American Spelling Book, contained the
15 Ten Commandments and sold more than one hundred million copies for
16 use by public school children all across the nation and was still
17 available for use in American public schools in the year 1975."

18 4. A public school district or charter school in this state may
19 also display the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence,
20 as provided for in Section 24-106.1 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma
21 Statutes, and the Northwest Ordinance with the Ten Commandments.

22 5. The provisions of this section shall not require a school
23 district board of education or charter school governing body to
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1 spend its funds to purchase displays. To provide the displays free
2 of charge, the board of education or governing body shall:

- 3 a. accept donated funds to purchase the displays, or
- 4 b. accept donated displays.

5 6. The State Department of Education shall identify and publish
6 on its website appropriate resources to comply with the provisions
7 of this section that are free of charge.

8 B. The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules to
9 oversee implementation of the provisions of this act.

10 SECTION 3. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified
11 in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 3205.15 of Title 70, unless
12 there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

13 A. 1. No later than January 1, 2026, the governing board of
14 each institution within The Oklahoma State System of Higher
15 Education shall require each institution under its jurisdiction to
16 display the Ten Commandments in each classroom on the institution's
17 campus. At a minimum, the Ten Commandments shall be displayed on a
18 poster or framed document that is at least eleven (11) inches by
19 fourteen (14) inches. The text of the Ten Commandments shall be the
20 central focus of the poster or framed document and shall be printed
21 in a large, easily readable font.

22 2. The text of the Ten Commandments shall be identical to the
23 language set forth in paragraph 2 of subsection A of Section 2 of
24 this act.

1 3. The provisions of this section shall not require the
2 governing board of an institution of higher education within The
3 Oklahoma State System of Higher Education to spend its funds to
4 purchase such displays. The governing board of an institution may
5 spend donated funds to purchase the Ten Commandments or may accept
6 donated displays.

7 B. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education shall
8 promulgate rules to oversee implementation of the provisions of this
9 act.

10 SECTION 4. This act shall become effective July 1, 2025.

11 SECTION 5. It being immediately necessary for the preservation
12 of the public peace, health, or safety, an emergency is hereby
13 declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and
14 be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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