

Senate Education Committee

Ava Hawkes 271-4151

HB 69, relative to the display of the national motto in schools.

Hearing Date: April 20, 2021

Time Opened: 9:03 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:15 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ward, Hennessey, Ricciardi and Prentiss

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Kahn

Bill Analysis: This bill permits school boards to provide copies of the national motto of the United States for display in each school building in the district.

Sponsors:

Rep. True

Rep. Abramson

Rep. Greene

Rep. Piemonte

Rep. Torosian

Rep. Hobson

Rep. Folsom

Who supports the bill: Representative Chris True, Representative Deborah Hobson, Representative Rick Ladd, Representative Judy Aron, Eric Pauer, Elaine Thomas

Who opposes the bill: 107 people signed up in opposition to this bill. Full sign-in sheet available upon request.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Chris True – Rockingham, District 4

- Representative True introduced HB 69.
- This bill is enabling legislation.
- This bill makes an important statement to school boards by protecting schools if displaying the motto is taken to court. The NH Attorney General's Office will protect them.
- Schools are often bullied when this idea arises.
- Certain groups have sued in federal court to have the national motto removed from currency.
- The U.S. Supreme Court has rejected these suits and they continue to be refiled.

- This bill also allows schools to accept non-public funds to cover cost of displaying the national motto.
- The national motto is not a divisive phrase.
- A reasonable observer would not perceive it as a religious endorsement.
- Senator Prentiss asked Representative True if displaying the national motto is currently prohibited.
 - Representative True said there are no RSAs preventing folks from displaying it, the stipulation is that if someone threatens with a lawsuit, there would be protection via this bill.
- Senator Prentiss asked Representative True if this bill solely provides protection. Representative True said that's how he understands it.
- Senator Prentiss asked if Representative True has a statement or opinion from the Attorney General's Office on this bill.
 - Representative True said he does not.
- Senator Prentiss asked if we should have their input as they have not been consulted or is this precedent. Representative True said he has not spoken with anyone in the Attorney General's Office.
- Senator Prentiss asked Representative True if by accepting non-public funds, where folks are donating money to schools, will we be setting up a competitive precedent in school districts. Additionally, how would competing offers be handled.
 - Representative True said he put that stipulation in the bill to prevent the issue of school districts saying there is not enough money to fulfill this request. He said he has no problem with multiple organizations pooling their funds to assist in funding these kinds of projects.
- Senator Prentiss asked why now the need, for this bill, if not currently prohibited.
 - Representative True said displaying our national motto would be educational for students.
 - This bill does not say it needs to be posted, it is all voluntary.
 - It reduces fear of additional costs associated with lawsuits when displaying the motto as an educational tool.
- Senator Ricciardi asked Representative True if adding the state's motto, Live Free or Die, would make this bill more centric.
 - Representative True said the bill is in the Senate's possession now, he'd have no objection in adding that through an amendment.
- Senator Prentiss asked for clarity on the use of the terms, sometimes used interchangeably, state motto and national motto throughout the language of the bill. On page two, it is referred to as the state motto as opposed to the national motto.
 - Representative True did not have the bill in front of him, he believes that is a typo.

- The state's motto was not initially part of the bill.
- Senator Hennessey noted for Senator Prentiss that if she is looking at page two, line 1 and line 3, she believes that is the umbrella RSA for mottos.

BJ Wahl

- Opposed to this bill.
- Sullivan, NH resident.
- NH and VT are the least religious states.
- She finds this bill offensive.
- It would indoctrinate innocent children with something potentially against their own religion.
- Schools should be inclusive places, not divisive.
- So many folks being angry with this bill means it is divisive.
- Church and home are places for religion, not state funded buildings.
- All beliefs matter.

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Date Hearing Report completed: April 21, 2021