State of Tennessee

PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 924

HOUSE BILL NO. 47

By Representatives Hale, Darby, Moon, Raper, Grills, Tim Hicks, Stinnett, Hawk, Sherrell, Slater, Greg Martin, Wright, Doggett, Eldridge, Todd, Lynn, Davis, Littleton, Reneau, McCalmon, Warner, Hulsey, Butler, Hill, Barrett, Fritts, Sparks, Reeves, Zachary, Rudd, Bulso, Bricken, Capley, Keisling, Lafferty, Maberry, Garrett, Powers

Substituted for: Senate Bill No. 303

By Senators Pody, Crowe, Bailey, Bowling, Gardenhire, Hatcher, Hensley, Jackson, Lowe, Rose, Seal, Southerland, Stevens, White

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, relative to the display of historical documents.

WHEREAS, the United States regularly has acknowledged the role that fundamental religious documents and principles have in American heritage law; and

WHEREAS, one of the most recognized sets of foundational principles were the Ten Commandments, which were displayed in public buildings across the United States, including in schools, government buildings, and courthouses; and

WHEREAS, for the last several decades, expression of that heritage has been restricted; and

WHEREAS, the *Lemon* test was the culmination of separationists' fight to eradicate all references to religion from the public sphere; and

WHEREAS, litigants like the American Humanist Association, American Atheists, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and The Satanic Temple used the *Lemon* test to block as many displays of America's religious heritage as they could, including the Ten Commandments displays and veterans' memorials; and

WHEREAS, one of the largest upheavals was in *Stone v. Graham* in 1980, where the Supreme Court used the *Lemon* test to strike down Kentucky's law requiring that the Ten Commandments be displayed in public schools; and

WHEREAS, prior to *Stone v. Graham*, many public schools displayed the Ten Commandments, and after *Stone v. Graham*, public schools across the country almost universally removed the Ten Commandments displays; and

WHEREAS, now, however, the legal landscape has changed due to *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, as the Supreme Court overturned *Lemon*, which eliminated the *Lemon* test and instead looks to United States' history and tradition for whether the government may recognize our religious heritage; and

WHEREAS, unfortunately, after over fifty years of *Lemon's* rule, the traditional recognitions of our religious heritage are very slow to return; and

WHEREAS, many government officials are afraid of the ghost of *Lemon*, continuing to eliminate any trace of religion from their purview because of years of being told that such displays are impermissible; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 20, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

(a) Local boards of education and public charter school governing bodies, as defined in § 49-13-104, may allow schools in the LEA or the public charter school, as

applicable, to display the Ten Commandments, the first sentence of the second paragraph of the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, and the preamble to the United States Constitution in a prominent location in a school building in order to educate students on the documents' historical significance and how the documents shaped the common cultural heritage of the LEA or public charter school, this state, and the United States of America.

(b) If a local board of education or public charter school governing body elects to display the Ten Commandments, then the text of the Ten Commandments used in display must be the following text:

"The Ten Commandments

I AM the LORD thy God.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven images.

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

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."

(c) Fraternal and other organizations or individuals are encouraged to donate the funds or materials necessary for the display authorized in subsection (a).

(d) Each local board of education and public charter school governing body shall determine the size and placement of the display authorized in subsection (a); provided, that the display must be in a prominent location, with text in a font size that is no smaller than least twenty-six (26) point, and in a style and manner that is easy for students to see and read.

(e) As used in subsection (a), "prominent location" means a school entryway, cafeteria, or common area where students are likely to see the display.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect July 1, 2026, the public welfare requiring it, and applies to the 2026-2027 school year and each school year thereafter.

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PASSED: April 23, 2026

CAMERON SEXTON, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

RANDY MCNALLY
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

APPROVED this 7th day of May 2026

BILL LEE, GOVERNOR