

SUBJECT: Displaying national motto in public schools, higher education institutions

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Dutton, Lozano, Allison, K. Bell, Buckley, Huberty, K. King, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — M. González

4 present not voting — Allen, Bernal, Meza, Talarico

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 19 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — Tom Nobis, Republican Party of Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jill Glover, Republican Party of Texas; Mary Castle, Texas Values Action; Karen Marshall; Diana Spain)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Valerie DeBill, League of Women Voters of Texas; Joshua Houston, Texas Impact; and nine individuals)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Eric Marin, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 1.004 permits a public elementary or secondary school or a public institution of higher education to display the U.S. national motto, "In God We Trust," in each classroom, auditorium, and cafeteria. Some have suggested requiring schools and colleges to display posters of the national motto that had been donated for that purpose.

DIGEST: SB 797 would require a public elementary or secondary school or a public institution of higher education to display in a conspicuous place in each building of the school or institution a durable poster or framed copy of the U.S. national motto, "In God We Trust," if the poster or framed copy met

certain requirements and was donated for display or purchased from private donations and made available to the school or institution.

A poster or framed copy would have to contain a representation of the U.S. flag centered under the national motto and a representation of the Texas flag, and could not depict any words, images, or other information.

A public elementary or secondary school and a public higher education institution could accept and use private donations for the poster or framed copy of the national motto.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.