



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 5, 2013

## Louisiana Legislature Passes Bill Promoting Student-led Prayer in Schools

The Louisiana State Legislature has given its final approval to a bill that affirms the right of students to hold prayer meetings in the state's public schools. On June 1 the state Senate voted unanimously in favor of House Bill 724, which was previously approved by the state Assembly. Introduced in the Senate by Democrat Katrina Jackson, the bill confirms that students of any faith background can receive permission from school officials to use classrooms, assembly halls, or other available space for prayer or reflection. Additionally, noted the [Shreveport Times](#), "a teacher or school administrator, parent or someone from the community may be invited to participate or supervise."



Another of the bill's sponsors, Democratic Senator Sharon Broome, conceded that students can already do what the bill specifies, but she said that many are not aware of their rights, or have been intimidated into silence by secular groups attempting to stop religious expression. Broome told the Times that she believes more prayer in schools is needed "with all the challenges young people face today." Republican Senator Mike Walsworth, another of the bill's supporters, said that when students become aware of the law, "I think more will gather together at a more peaceful time, holding hands."

While the bill does not change the present climate for religious expression in Louisiana's public schools, the atheist group [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#) (AU) nonetheless took the opportunity to criticize the state legislature for publicly affirming the right of students to pray. "Let's get something straight," simpered the AU atheists in a statement. "Truly voluntary student prayer has always been legal in public schools. Neither the Constitution, nor the Supreme Court has ever said otherwise. But this divisive bill goes far beyond that fact and pushes school districts into problematic territory."

The secular group complained that with the passage of H.B. 724, "the Louisiana legislature has invited sectarian tensions into a place where all children should feel welcome regardless of their feelings about faith. It is shameful that not one single Louisiana legislator had the courage to stand up and say this bill is wrong." The AU concluded by issuing its predictable subtle threat, warning that "we'll be watching carefully to see how this measure plays out at the local level. If it results in abuses of the rights of students, lawsuits are almost certain to occur."

Meanwhile, while the AU and other atheist attack groups weren't watching, a South Carolina high school valedictorian took the law into his own hands, setting aside his school-district approved graduation speech in front of parents, teachers, and school officials, and replacing it with a bold recitation of the Lord's Prayer.



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On June 1 Roy Costner IV, valedictorian of Liberty High School in Pickens County, South Carolina, stepped up to the podium at his high school graduation with approved speech in hand. The school board had previously decided to halt the tradition of prayer at the school's graduation ceremony, citing threats from both the ACLU and the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

But, as reported by the [Christian News Network](#), moments after beginning to speak from his prepared script, Costner shifted gears, thanking his parents for raising him as a Christian. "Those that we look up to, they have helped carve and mold us into the young adults that we are today," Costner told his audience. "I'm so glad that both of my parents led me to the Lord at a young age."

Costner then told those assembled, "I think most of you will understand when I say," following up with, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name,. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Reported the Christian News Network: "As attendees realized that Costner was reciting the Lord's Prayer, applause began to break out in the coliseum. Within seconds, the applause was accompanied by loud cheers. 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,' he continued. 'For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.'"

Pickens County School District spokesman John Eby told local reporters covering the story that Costner would not be disciplined for his impromptu acknowledgement of God. "The bottom line is, we're not going to punish students for expressing their religious faith," Eby said. "He's a graduate now. There's nothing we can do about it, even if we wanted to."

As for the AU, ACLU, Freedom From Religion Foundation, and other atheist complainers, all declined to weigh in on the incident. However, less than a week after Costner's speech nearly 45,000 individuals had logged on to YouTube to view the clip (below) of Costner's reverent display and to offer overwhelming support for his humble defiance of those attempting to silence expressions of faith in the public square.

"Brilliant young man!" posted one individual in response to the video. "Bless you for standing up for your right!" Wrote another: "That is what the 1st Amendment is all about," followed by another comment that read: "Well played sir! Congratulations on that!" Even a self-identified atheist responded to the video with, "I applaud this man."



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