
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 351 Session of
2013

INTRODUCED BY COHEN, FLYNN, GINGRICH, KIRKLAND, KOTIK, MAHONEY,
PAINTER AND THOMAS, JUNE 5, 2013

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, JUNE 5, 2013

A RESOLUTION

1 Designating the month of June 2013 as "Public School Religious
2 Freedom Month" in Pennsylvania.

3 WHEREAS, The founders of the United States of America
4 provided for the separation of religion and government through
5 the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First
6 Amendment of the United States Constitution; and

7 WHEREAS, These protections were applied to this Commonwealth
8 and other states through the Fourteenth Amendment; and

9 WHEREAS, The Commonwealth and other states enacted
10 legislation mandating daily school-sponsored Bible reading and
11 prayer in public schools, which often conflicted with the
12 personal religious perspectives of nonbelievers, agnostics,
13 atheists and believers of many different faiths; and

14 WHEREAS, Section 3 of Article I of the Constitution of
15 Pennsylvania states that "no human authority can, in any case
16 whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience";
17 and

18 WHEREAS, On June 17, 1963, the United States Supreme Court

1 handed down its decision in the case of *School District of*
2 *Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, consolidated with
3 *Murray v. Curlett*, striking down public school-sponsored Bible
4 reading and prayer as unconstitutional; and

5 WHEREAS, The decision is recognized by legal scholars as a
6 landmark case with significant precedential value, laying the
7 groundwork for other cases concerning religion in public schools
8 and helping to pave the way for a public school system that does
9 not discriminate against other faiths and philosophies; and

10 WHEREAS, The decision makes an important distinction between
11 legal, truly voluntary prayer and coercive prayer in public
12 schools and lays down reasonable guidelines by allowing the
13 academic study about religion, while forbidding mandatory forms
14 of worship; and

15 WHEREAS, In *Schempp*, Justice Tom C. Clark affirmed the value
16 of freedom of conscience in stirring words, writing, "The place
17 of religion in our society is an exalted one, achieved through a
18 long tradition of reliance on the home, the church and the
19 inviolable citadel of the individual heart and mind. We have
20 come to recognize through bitter experience that it is not
21 within the power of government to invade that citadel, whether
22 its purpose or effect be to aid or oppose, to advance or retard.
23 In the relationship between man and religion, the State is
24 firmly committed to a position of neutrality"; and

25 WHEREAS, June 17, 2013, marks the 50th anniversary of the
26 *Schempp* decision, which protects the right of conscience and
27 shields young people from divisive government-sanctioned
28 religious activities in public schools, while protecting
29 individual, nondisruptive forms of school prayer; therefore be
30 it

1 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives designate the
2 month of June 2013 as "Public School Religious Freedom Month" in
3 Pennsylvania.