



MISSOURI SENATE  
JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the  
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## Upholding Religious Freedom in Missouri Schools

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Freedom of speech and expression is one of our fundamental rights upheld in our country's Constitution. Despite this amendment that has been established since 1791, there has been some confusion in terms of expressing religious beliefs in Missouri schools.

The United States Supreme Court has used the separation of church and state doctrine more than 25 times in rendering its decisions. Separation of church and state establishes that government and religious institutions will be kept separate and independent from each other. In Missouri, our courts use [Article I](#), sections [5](#), [6](#), and [7](#) of the Missouri Constitution as the basis for Missouri's separation of church and state.

I want to ensure our religious freedom by filing [Senate Joint Resolution 12](#). Joint resolutions are used to submit a proposed constitutional amendment to a vote of the people. It requires the same treatment as a bill in its passage through both the Senate and House of Representatives and has the force of law, but does not require the governor's signature.

Upon voter approval, Senate Joint Resolution 12 reaffirms a citizen's right to free expression of religion. The amendment states that you have the right as an individual or part of a group to pray in all private or public areas, as long as the prayer does not disturb the peace, disrupt a public meeting or assembly, or block public access.

Senate Joint Resolution 12 would also allow students to be engaged in private and voluntary prayer, acknowledgement of God, or other religious expressions, individually or in groups, and express their religious beliefs in school assignments without discrimination based on the religious content of their work.

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And finally, Senate Joint Resolution 12 explicitly prohibits the establishment of any official state religion and any state coercion to participate in prayer or other religious activities. According to the resolution, the General Assembly and other governing bodies may have ministers and clergy persons offer invocations or prayers at meetings or session.

Before the start of each legislative workday, my colleagues and I begin with a special prayer. I could not imagine having restrictions in regards to sharing in God's grace before discussing and debating on important and sometimes difficult issues facing our state. Passage of Senate Joint Resolution 12 would ensure everyone's right to free religious expression.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: [delbertscott@senate.mo.gov](mailto:delbertscott@senate.mo.gov).

*Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.*

