



## **The Prayer in Public Schools Law: S.B. 11**

On June 21, 2025, Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill into law ([SB 11](#)) that requires every school district and charter school in the state to hold a vote on whether to adopt a policy “to provide students and employees with an opportunity to participate in a period of prayer and reading of the Bible or other religious text on each school day.”

Texas students already have the right to voluntarily pray and read religious literature. However, these prayer periods would be organized by the school, could involve or be led by school staff, and could take place during the school day. Under this bill, teachers will be allowed to encourage students to pray (or not to pray) and parents that would like their child to participate will have to sign away their First Amendment rights.

Families and students can let their school boards know that they oppose the establishment of these prayer periods by commenting at school board meetings and directly contacting their trustees. If the prayer periods are established, parents may withhold permission for their children to take part in them.

### **This Toolkit**

This new law requires all public school districts to vote on whether they will permit school-sponsored prayer periods by March 1, 2026. Whether you’re a parent, teacher, faith leader, advocate, concerned community member, or a student yourself, you should be concerned about this infringement on our foundational separation of church and state.

Read on for resources to help you oppose this law and advocate for the rights of all students to belong, learn, and practice faith freely without government coercion.

### **How to Talk About the School-Prayer Policy**

Community members from all different backgrounds oppose the adoption of school prayer in Texas public schools. We must talk about the issue in a manner that brings us together rather than divides us. Strong messaging across our community ensures your efforts are amplified and heard by the board. Urge your local school district to vote to reject establishing state-organized prayer periods by using these talking points:

- **School-sponsored prayer violates students’ and parents’ constitutional rights.**

- Both the First Amendment in the U.S Constitution and Article 1 of the Texas Constitution protect our right to religious freedom. School-sponsored prayer periods could violate students' First Amendment rights by permitting government entities to organize and regulate religious activities in public schools, and by allowing school staff to encourage students to pray or not to pray at school—which may contradict their families' beliefs.
  - Under this bill, school districts could allow staff to participate in the school-organized prayer and religious-text reading periods alongside students. This would violate longstanding constitutional rights that prohibit public-school employees from engaging in religious exercise with students.
  - This law could lead school districts to promote the use of prayers from only one religious tradition, as encouraged by the [guidance](#) of Attorney General Paxton. This would infringe on the religious freedom of students who do not subscribe to the state's preferred religion and on the rights of parents to guide their children's religious upbringing without government interference.
  - Parents have the ultimate authority under the US Constitution to direct the moral and religious upbringing of their children. S.B. 11 could violate these rights by coercing students into participating in religious practices that conflict with their families' teachings.
  - Even if a student (and their family) wants to participate in prayer time during the day—the prayer periods of SB 11 likely won't meet their needs and may still violate their rights. For example, the prayers authorized by S.B. 11 can happen out loud, and even be led by teachers, which can lead to a student feeling pressured to take part in prayers that do not align with their religious practices.
  - The U.S. and Texas Constitutions make clear that it is incumbent on individuals—not the government—to decide when, how, and whether to pray or exercise our faith. Authorizing public schools to take it upon themselves to organize time explicitly devoted to student and staff prayer and Bible readings—potentially even during the school day—contravenes our country's foundational principles and distracts from the educational mission of public schools in our state.
- **Schools have limited time and resources, and this only takes more time away from instruction.**

- This policy would likely require schools to track permission slips, separate students, monitor classrooms, schedule prayer periods, and resolve religious disputes. This administrative burden would take away critical resources that could instead be spent creating high quality and inclusive public schools.
  - Implementation of this policy will be a logistical nightmare: schools would likely struggle to find the space and the supervisors to successfully separate the students who are participating in prayer periods from the students who are not.
  - Our schools should dedicate their limited time and resources to instruction and leave the religious instruction to families and houses of worship. Public schools should prioritize student performance and achievement, not religious indoctrination.
  - Texas public schools are not Sunday schools.
  - Schools should be for education, not evangelization.
- **Students can already practice their faith in schools, including prayer, and schools can already teach about religion in certain ways.**
    - Texas students already have the robust rights to voluntarily pray, read religious literature (including the Bible), or engage in other religious activities during their free time, such as recess and lunch. They may also express their religious beliefs in school assignments, where relevant, and pass out religious literature to their classmates in the same manner that they may distribute non-religious materials. S.B. 11 is a solution to a prayer-rights problem that doesn't actually exist.
    - There are already religious events and extracurricular clubs that students can engage in before or after school, including 'See You at the Pole' prayer events and Bible study groups. Again, S.B. 11 is a solution to a prayer-rights problem that doesn't actually exist.
    - Schools can already teach and provide information about religious concepts thanks to neutral social studies and world-religion courses and school libraries.
  - **This policy risks creating more division in public schools and ostracizing students.**
    - Texas' public schools serve families who practice a rich diversity of religions, as well as many families who do not practice any faith. This policy meaningfully threatens student belonging and inclusion.

- Texas students deserve to show up at school as their authentic selves.
- Students may feel pressured to participate in the prayer periods, even if they practice a different faith or no faith at all, so they don't face exclusion, rejection, or bullying from their peers.
- Students may also feel pressured or coerced by school staff into the prayer periods, especially since staff would be allowed to “encourage” students to pray and to potentially lead prayer periods.
- Schools should be places of belonging that welcomes differences. These prayer periods will likely lead to religious discrimination and bullying.
- Decisions about whether, when, or how to pray and read scripture should be left to parents, students themselves, and faith communities.

## **Ways You Can Take Action**

- [Contact School Board Members or Speak at a School Board Meeting](#)
- [Write a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed](#)
- [Collect Petition Signatures](#)
- [Organize Protests or Rallies](#)

## **Contact School Board Members or Speak at a School Board Meeting**

Every public school district in Texas has a school board that makes decisions on important education issues, including whether to allow prayer periods in your schools. Under S.B. 11, all public school districts must vote on whether they will hold a daily period of prayer of the Bible or other religious texts by March 1, 2026.

Contacting school board members is a great way to show them that the community cares about this issue and, consequently, wants the board to take appropriate action. Use the templates below to urge your school board members to reject S.B. 11 and adopt the [alternative resolution](#) that affirms student's constitutional rights to prayer and religious study in school. You can contact school board members via:

- Email
- Phone Calls
- Letters
- Testimony at school board meeting

Direct testimony at a school board meeting is an especially powerful way to voice your opposition against the school prayer policy and register your official stance on the public record. To find out where and how your district announces school board meetings, check

its website (try using a search engine and typing “[Your School District] ISD School Board Meeting Agenda”). Then search through upcoming meeting agendas to find out when your school board will be discussing whether to permit a period of prayer or not (such agenda items may say discuss “senate bill number SB 11” or “Section 25.0823 of the Texas Education Code” or “prayer period”).

Finally, make sure to check whether your district has any special requirements in terms of speaking before the school board. For example, many districts require speakers to sign up in advance by filling out a form or sending an administrative email request.

When preparing to speak at a school board meeting, writing a call script, or drafting an email/letter to a board member follow this outline:

1. **Introduce Yourself:** Who are you? Are you a parent/relative, a current or former student/educator, or a concerned community member?
2. **State Your Stance:** Are you in favor of or opposed to the school prayer law?
3. **Reason for Testifying:** In what ways does this issue or law affect you and your family and/or community? What do you believe about this policy will be harmful? Look at the talking points above and below for inspiration.
4. **Make The Ask:** Directly ask the school board to heed your concerns and vote accordingly (e.g. “As a constituent of this school district, I ask that you put students first and vote against state organized prayer in schools by adopting the [alternative resolution](#).”)
5. **Close:** Thank them for their time.

### **Email, Call, Testimony: Script Example**

Dear Trustee [Last Name] / Dear [Your School District] Board of Trustees,

#### **Introduce Yourself:**

*EXAMPLE:*

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am a [parent/guardian/relative, student, educator, person of faith, community member] in [school district, city].*

#### **State Your Stance on the Prayer Period Policy:**

*EXAMPLE:*

*I am contacting you today to urge board members to vote against the adoption of the school prayer and Bible reading policy during next week’s vote.*

#### **Explain Why This Issue is Important and/or may be Harmful to you and Your Community:**

*EXAMPLE:*

*My family is nonreligious, so I plan to exempt my child from school prayer should this be adopted. However, I worry that they would be ostracized for not praying while everyone else prays. No child should have to choose between faith and fitting in, and this policy threatens to divide students based on their religious practices.*

**EXAMPLE:**

*We are practicing Christians, and I do not want or need a prayer period in schools. We have the option of praying at home or at church. Therefore, I do not want resources and time taken away from the school day for prayer. Nor do I want the possibility of other students or staff members talking to my child about religion in a way that undermines what they are learning at home and at church. My child is attending school to learn, and instructional time should be dedicated to that purpose.*

**EXAMPLE:**

*As a Muslim student, I do not want to be pressured to participate in Bible reading sessions facilitated by my teachers. Students are already allowed to freely practice their religion, and this policy doesn't enhance that right -- it infringes upon it. Should this policy be adopted, I fear feeling alienated from or bullied by my classmates by not participating.*

**Make The Ask:**

**EXAMPLE:**

*I ask that you vote against adopting prayer periods in our school district. Public schools should be places where students of all or no faiths are respected. Reject state-organized prayer in our school, to protect students' right to belong and practice their faith freely without government coercion.*

**Close:**

**EXAMPLE:**

*Thank you for taking the time to [read my letter/ answer my call/hear my testimony]. I hope you will keep my words in mind when voting against this harmful policy.*

Sincerely,  
(Full name)  
(Address)  
(Phone number)

**S.B. 11 Draft Alternative Resolution**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

\_\_\_\_\_ **INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**RESOLUTION**

Resolution Affirming Our Constitutional and Legal Right to Choose to Pray in School

**WHEREAS**, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects students’ religious freedom in public school. Specifically, the Establishment Clause ensures that the government cannot favor any particular religious belief or religion over non-belief, and the Free Exercise Clause ensures that individuals have the right to practice their religious beliefs, free from government interference; and

**WHEREAS**, Article I, § 6 of the Texas Constitution guarantees the “separation of church and state” and embodies the principle that “religion is a matter of private conscience with which the state . . . is forbidden to interfere.” *Watts v. Watts*, 563 S.W.2d 314, 317 (Tex. Civ. App. 1978), *writ refused NRE* (July 5, 1978), *disapp’d on other grounds by Jones v. Cable*, 626 S.W.2d 734 (Tex. 1981); and

**WHEREAS**, the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act, Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 110.003, prohibits school districts and other government entities from “substantially burden[ing] a person’s free exercise of religion”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Texas Education Code § 25.901 affirms that “[a] public school student has an absolute right to individually, voluntarily, and silently pray or meditate in school in a manner that does not disrupt the instructional or other activities of the school. A person may not require or coerce a student to engage in or refrain from such prayer or meditation during any school activity”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Texas Education Code § 25.082(d) establishes a school district’s ability to institute a period of silence during which students may choose to “reflect, pray, meditate, or engage in any other silent activity that is not likely to interfere with or distract another student”;

**NOW, LET IT BE HEREBY RESOLVED**

**THAT** the \_\_\_\_\_ ISD Board of Trustees is committed to cultivating and maintaining a respectful school environment for students and teachers of any or no religious background; and

**THAT** the \_\_\_\_\_ ISD Board of Trustees, in consideration of the laws and policies recited above, votes against a resolution to adopt a state-organized prayer policy for our district, as contemplated by S.B. 11, 89th Legislature, codified at Texas Education Code § 25.0823.

PRESENTED AND APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_

## Write a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed

Writing and sending letters to your local newspaper is a powerful way to let elected officials know where the public stands on issues that affect the community. Go to your local paper's website to first check for their word limits and submission instructions. Then, when writing, follow the outlines below.

### Letter to the Editor Outline:

- Cite the article you are responding to
- State your position
- Tell your story
- State a few statistics or facts about the issue and conclude with your call to action.  
*See a sample template [here](#).*

### Op-Ed Outline:

- Catch the reader's attention
- State your position
- Offer evidence that backs up your opinion. This can be:
  - Personal stories
  - Quotes from reputable sources
  - Statistics/studies
  - Scripture
- Call to Action: Ask readers to make sure school board members hear from them
- Kicker: End with a final piece of evidence, vision for the future, or circle back to your argument

After submitting your letter to the editor or op-ed, call the paper to make sure they received it. This will help bump your letter up in line. Continually check the paper to see whether your letter has been published. If it has, share it on social media to reach even more community members.

## Collect Petition Signatures

Petitions create public support by encouraging conversations within your community and building relationships with supporters whom you can take action with in other ways.

### How to Create a Petition

Include important key points in your petition:

- Who you are petitioning and space for signees' names, contact information, and where they live to show they are a constituent of your school district.

### **Recruit Volunteers**

This can help increase your efforts and create a stronger community of advocates.

### **Choose a Location to Collect Signatures**

Your local public libraries, grocery stores, community college campuses, or other high-traffic public areas in your school district are all good options. You can also collect petitions by going to public events like sports games or going door-to-door canvassing.

### **Prepare Your Materials**

Print and bring multiple blank petition sheets, pens, clipboards, and any information about S.B. 11 that you want to hand out (keep it simple). Visit the “Stop Texas’ State-Organized Prayer in School Law” website at <https://bjconline.org/stateorganizedprayer/> for resources.

### **Train Volunteers**

Before heading out to collect signatures, provide group trainings to ensure people understand the implications of the school prayer law and how to connect with others.

1. **Give context:** Why are you collecting petition signatures today? Why is this important? How does collecting signatures help your cause?
2. **Give tips** on how to be successful at collecting petitions, like:
  - Be friendly. A big wave and smile will increase the number of people who stop to sign your petition!
  - Make a strong, direct ask like: “Hi, can you sign a petition to oppose school-sponsored prayer in our public schools?”
  - Make sure to get complete contact information. Collecting signatures can build a list of community members who are with us and that we can contact later to get involved. Ask for people’s phone numbers and email addresses if they don’t initially write them down.
3. **Review** any materials that may be useful for volunteers.
4. **Practice:** Have volunteers practice the script you’re using, if any, or just practice stopping people, asking them to sign petitions, and carrying a conversation about the topic.

## **During Your Event**

Take pictures to share on social media to spread the word. Post them later as a way to publicly thank your volunteers, and tag local organizations like the ACLU of Texas, [INSERT PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS HERE] so we can show off all the good work you are doing!

## **After Your Event**

Collect your materials and debrief with your volunteers. Make sure to get all the signed petition sheets back. Ask your volunteers how their experience was. Remind everyone how important their work today was, and thank everyone.

## **Turn in Your Petitions to Decision-Makers**

When you're ready to drop off your petitions, organize a petition drop, such as an opportunity to present the petitions to the school board at a meeting! You can even invite media to attend the petition drop.

## **Organize Protests and Rallies**

Protests and rallies apply public pressure and generate attention.

### **Organizing the Protest or Rally**

**Pick a time, date, and location** that's symbolically significant. For example, your location of choice could be near your school district's administrative building, and your time could be just before a school board meeting begins. The best protests are short and high-energy, so don't plan for your event to run for longer than an hour, and keep the number of speakers between two and four. Make sure you double check any relevant free speech policies regarding when and where you can safely protest in your community (start by visiting [www.aclutx.org/protest](http://www.aclutx.org/protest) to understand your basic First Amendment rights).

**Recruit attendees.** Post your event on friendly parent groups, share it on social media, invite your friends and family, post flyers in public places, etc. You can also identify other stakeholders (community groups, orgs, etc.) who share your cause and reach out to them.

**Make signs.** Remember that any sign you make could end up in the news, so make sure the message is simple and clear. Making signs is a great activity for a group meeting before your protest. Print out chant and/or song sheets to keep the crowd energized.

**Invite the press.** Include local, state, and national affiliates of media outlets and newspapers. Tell them the exact protest time and the reason for the protest. Appoint a press lead for your group to coordinate communication with the press and act as a spokesperson for the group.

**Prepare action items for after the event.** This is an excellent opportunity to gather supporters and attract community members to your cause. Plan ways to engage with them after the event, such as creating a list of attendees' contact information or letting them know future opportunities to engage with your movement.

**Delegate responsibilities for the day of the event.** Depending on how big you expect your event to be, it's best to have a volunteer or volunteer team assigned to these responsibilities:

- Leading chants and keeping energy high
- Prepared to talk to the press
- Taking photos and video
- Greeting and collecting contact information from attendees
- Point person for dealing with any disruptive participants or questions from law enforcement
- Speakers ready to share their personal stories (if this is part of your event)

### **During the Protest or Rally**

**Be visible and be loud!** Well-organized protests will take advantage of key high-visibility areas to show off signs and let locals know what you are advocating for.

**Take photos and videos.** Designate several people in your group to take photos and videos that you can post on social media as well as distribute to the press later.

**Be safe and follow the law (such as any permitting requirements),** but also be aware of your First Amendment right to be there and do what you are doing. Police will typically be most concerned with keeping you off the street and keeping sidewalks clear for pedestrians. Comply with the lawful orders they give you but insist on your right to protest.

**Find reporters** and tell them why you're there—getting local press coverage and making it clear that local community members support you is pivotal.

## After the Protest or Rally

**Follow up with local reporters.** Email them photos and videos from the protest and any other important information, including the number of people who attended.

**Share your photos** on social media to show more people what you're doing.

**Follow up with activists** who attended on the next steps. Thank them for coming and remind them of what you're doing next to help achieve your goal.

**Plan** your next event or action.