

# Allegheny County Council

*County of Allegheny  
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Phone (412) 350-6490*



## Meeting Minutes - Approved

Thursday, August 28, 2014

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

## Committee on Government Reform

*John DeFazio-Chair*

*Members: Barbara Daly Danko, Jim Ellenbogen, Mike Finnerty, Nick Futules, Amanda Green Hawkins, Ed Kress, Charles Martoni, & Sue Means*

## I. Call to Order

*The meeting was called to order at 4:01.*

### Invited Guests: William D. McKain, CPA-County Manager or Designee

*Mr. Barker, Ms. Sicard and Mr. Szymanski were present from the Office of County Council.*

## II. Roll Call

**Members Present:** 6 - DeFazio, Barbara Danko, Michael Finnerty, Ed Kress, Sue Means and Bob Macey

**Members Absent:** 3 - Jim Ellenbogen, Amanda Green Hawkins and Chuck Martoni

**Members Phone:** 1 - Nick Futules

## III. Approval of Minutes

[8457-14](#)

Motion to approve the minutes of the Allegheny County Council Committee on Government Reform held on April 24th, 2014

**Passed**

## IV. Agenda Items

### Resolutions

[8376-14](#)

A Resolution of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, supporting the display of the National Motto, "In God We Trust" to be displayed above a replication of the Bill of Rights and to be hung in a prominent location in the Gold Room of the Allegheny County Courthouse.

**Sponsors:** Council Member Means, Council Member Martoni, Council Member Palmiere, Council Member Kress, Council Member Heidelbaugh and Council Member Baker

*At the request of the Chair, the clerk read the title of the bill.*

*In response to a question from Mr. Finnerty, the Chair and the clerk indicated that a quorum to amend the bill was present, should the issue arise.*

*Ms. Means provided a summary of the bill and her reasons for introducing it, noting Congressional enactment of the national motto in 1956, the Supreme Court decisional law permitting the display of the national motto, and Congress' encouragement of the display of the motto in public buildings.*

*Mr. Finnerty noted that the issue before the Committee has nothing to do with patriotism in his opinion, but rather is a question of whether the County Courthouse should be altered in some fashion in order to reflect some quantum of patriotism. Mr. Finnerty continued to suggest that he would not be comfortable with any implicit suggestion that one notion of a supreme being is more appropriate or correct than any other.*

*Ms. Danko noted that, while she appreciates Ms. Means' efforts, her inclination is to separate any concepts of church and state to the extent possible, noting that the word*

"God" does not appear anywhere within the Constitution of the United States, which exists specifically to protect rights for all segments of the society. Ms. Danko continued to note that it seems counterintuitive to her to support cultural and religious diversity on the one hand, while simultaneously not including multiple concepts of a supreme being. She also suggested that, while preserving a historical reference to a diety on public property may be viewed very differently than placing a new reference from a legal standpoint, noting that Texas and Alabama have recently been the location of suits that have had different outcomes in recent years.

Ms. Means provided additional detail regarding recent Supreme Court caselaw.

Mr. Kress moved to amend the bill, proposing the inclusion of additional historically significant mottoes from the history of the United States and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in order to render the bill more inclusive of the respective histories of those mottoes. Mr. Finnerty seconded the motion to amend.

Ms. Danko indicated that she still could not support the bill, insofar as there are religions in which any written depiction of a diety is sacreligious and she would not want to implicitly exclude those faiths, noting that, regardless of the good intent underlying the bill, this particular type of measure is not something that she regards as fundamentally within the Charter given duties of Council.

The motion to amend passed with Mr. Finnerty, Mr. Kress, Ms. Means and the Chair voting in favor, Ms. Danko voting against, and Mr. Futules abstaining.

Ms. Means moved to affirmatively recommend the bill as amended, Mr. Kress seconded, and the motion passed with Mr. Finnerty, Mr. Futules, Mr. Kress, Ms. Means and the Chair voting in the affirmative, and Ms. Danko voting in the negative.

**Amended and Affirmatively Recommended as Amended**

## V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:25.