A Model Resolution for Tennessee School Boards

WHEREAS [name of district / board] agrees with the Tennessee General Assembly's view, expressed in the preamble to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030, that "[a]n important purpose of science education is to inform students about scientific evidence and to help students develop critical thinking skills necessary to become intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed citizens," and

WHEREAS [name of district / board] considers that it already endeavors, as Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030 requires, "to create an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about scientific subjects," and indeed all subjects within its curriculum, and

WHEREAS [name of district / board] wishes to comply with Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030's requirement that it "shall endeavor to assist teachers to find effective ways to present the science curriculum taught under the curriculum framework that may cause debate and disputation," and

WHEREAS Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030 describes "biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning" are topics the teaching of which "may cause debate and disputation," and

WHEREAS the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in assessing the bill that was enacted as Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030, wrote, "There is virtually no scientific controversy among the overwhelming majority of researchers on the core facts of global warming and evolution. Asserting that there are significant scientific controversies about the overall nature of these concepts when there are none will only confuse students, not enlighten them," and

WHEREAS the National Association of Biology Teachers, in assessing the bill that was enacted as Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030, wrote, "Concepts like evolution and climate change should not be misrepresented as controversial or needing of special evaluation. Instead, they should be presented as scientific explanations for events and processes that are supported by experimentation, logical analysis, and evidence-based revision based on detectable and measurable data," and

WHEREAS similar sentiments were expressed by numerous scientific and educational organizations, including the American Institute for Biological Sciences, the American Society

of Human Genetics, the National Association of Geoscience Teachers, the National Earth Science Teachers Association, the Tennessee Education Association, and the Tennessee Science Teachers Association, and

WHEREAS the requirement of Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030 that teachers shall not be prohibited "from helping students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories covered in the course being taught within the curriculum framework developed by the state board of education" is crucially unclear, as is exemplified by the fact that legislators who sponsored the bill are on record as disagreeing about whether "intelligent design" would be covered by the law (see "Tennessee legislature keeps monkeying around," *Inside Vandy*, April 8, 2012), and was recognized by Governor Haslam, who described the bill's provisions as unclear and likely to cause confusion (see "Tennessee evolution bill becomes law without governor's signature," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 10, 2012), and

WHEREAS there is legal precedent that the expounding of "intelligent design" and the religiously motivated denigration or disparagement of evolution in the public schools is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (see *Kitzmiller v. Dover* [2005], 400 F. Supp. 2d 707),

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED

that [name of district/board] encourages and expects its science teachers, in presenting such topics that "may cause debate and disputation," to understand, respect, and communicate the consensus of the scientific community, in order to present the science curriculum effectively to their students,

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That, in this spirit, and to ensure the highest-quality teaching of science in [name of district/board], the [trustees/board members] hereby direct the district to assume responsibility for assessing whether the methods and materials used by science teachers in discussing "the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories" comply with the requirements of Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1030, and the curriculum of [name of district/board],

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

that the [trustees/board members] hereby directs the district to ensure that science teachers who wish to use methods and materials in discussing "the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories" that are not presently approved by the [name of district/board] obtain written approval to do so from [district / board], pursuant to policies and procedures for ascertaining their relevance and quality.