

## It's Against the Law to Use Profanity in Mass.

Written by Eryn Roberts  
Monday, 25 June 2012 00:00

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**Issue:** Residents in Middleborough, Mass. have voted to make the foul-mouthed pay fines for swearing in public. At a town meeting, residents voted 183-50 to approve a proposal from the police chief to impose a \$20 fine on public profanity. Officials insist the proposal was not intended to censor casual or private conversations, but instead to crack down on loud, profanity-laden language used by teens and other young people in the downtown area and public parks.

The measure could raise questions about First Amendment rights, but state law does allow towns to enforce local laws that give police the power to arrest anyone who "addresses another person with profane or obscene language" in a public place. The ordinance gives police discretion over whether to ticket someone if they believe the cursing ban has been violated. Middleborough, a town of about 20,000 residents, has had a bylaw against public profanity since 1968. But because that bylaw essentially makes cursing a crime, it has rarely if ever been enforced, officials said, because it simply would not merit the time and expense to pursue a case through the courts. The ordinance would decriminalize public profanity, allowing police to write tickets as they would for a traffic violation. It would also decriminalize certain types of disorderly conduct, public drinking and marijuana use, and dumping snow on a roadway.

**Question: Is it a good idea? Should Houston have its own cursing jar, or is it infringing on rights?**

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### **Gary Radford**

If that was imposed everywhere it would pay the nation's debt off in two weeks. I'd be bankrupt in 72 hours.



### **Roger Felder**

Seriously? People swear, whether they mean any harm or not. It's not a good habit, but you're really going to pay for it.

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Francesca Ervin

**Francesca Ervin**

I don't know if imposing a fine on bad language is the answer, but the stuff you hear in public is getting h



Simone Riley

**Simone Riley**

I hope Houston will make its own cursing jar. There are way too many foul-mouthed people here. It's not