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Owner Byron Smith displays the new official state flag for Louisiana.

Louisiana adds blood drops to state flag

Eighth-grader inspires change

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Louisiana's state bird has taken one for the team.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco signed legislation to change the state flag May 25. The pelican on the flag will now officially have three drops of blood on its breast. The flag has depicted a mother pelican feeding her young on a blue background since 1912.

The standardization ends nearly a century of variation from zero to four drops of blood on the state bird's breast.

The drops emphasize the act of vulning, a mother wounding her breast to feed her young. They signify the government's willingness to sacrifice itself for the people of Louisiana as early settlers believed the pelican does for its young.

"The message of the three blood drops is absolutely where we need to be in this state," Rep. Yvonne Dorsey, D-Baton Rouge told the Associated Press.

The changes stem from the research of Joseph Louviere, a 14-year-old Vanderbilt Catholic High student from Houma. The eighth-grader's social studies project covered the iterations of Louisiana state flags, including the variation in number and outright disappearance of the drops of blood over the course of time.

The Louviere family contacted Rep. Damon Baldone, D-Houma, about the issue. Baldone drafted legislation to add three drops to the flag, and then let Louviere present his findings to the La. House Judiciary Committee.

"It fits perfectly with hurricanes Katrina and Rita," said Baldone. "We've been honoring citizens all session. [The flag changes] help make sure history doesn't forget Katrina."

After Louviere's presentation, Bill 833 was sent to the floor for debate. The bill unanimously passed in both the Senate and House.

"I think it's a great example of how an eighth-grader can change state law," Baldone said.

The legislation estimates zero financial impact on the state because no one will be required to discard old flags. The law only calls for state agencies to "take appropriate measures to implement the new design."

Baldone said that a flag ceremony is being planned to put the new design in place in important state areas like the capitol. Baldone said The Flag Shop in Baton Rouge has five of the new flags.

The law also affects the state seal. Both the state seal and state flag will feature the three drops of blood on the pelican's breast in the future.

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