

HJR 19 -- RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN PUBLIC PLACES

SPONSOR: Bearden

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Special Committee on General Laws by a vote of 6 to 1.

Upon voter approval, this proposed constitutional amendment guarantees a citizen's First Amendment right to pray and worship in all public areas including schools as long as the activities are voluntary and subject to the same rules and regulations that apply to all other types of speech.

The amendment also reaffirms a citizen's right to choose any religion or no religion at all by prohibiting both the establishment of an official state religion and any state coercion or endorsement of religion through practices as composing official state prayers.

Public schools receiving state funds are required to display the text of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States in a conspicuous and legible manner.

FISCAL NOTE: No impact on state funds in FY 2008, FY 2009, and FY 2010.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill will assure the religious freedoms of those people praying in public places, such as schools and government buildings. The provision requiring public schools to display the text of the First Amendment will increase public awareness of an individual's rights to engage in private and voluntary prayer during school hours. The bill also clarifies 40 years of confusion regarding acceptable school prayer that has existed since the United States Supreme Court started to hear cases regarding prayer in school.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Bearden; and Missouri Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.