

HCS HB 1345 -- ELECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES COURSES

SPONSOR: Baker

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 9 to 5. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative Oversight by a vote of 6 to 4.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 1345.

This bill allows a school district to offer an elective social studies unit on the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament of the Bible, or the New Testament of the Bible. The course will include the contents, history, literary style and structure, and influences on American history. No requirement shall be made by the district on the text translation students must use. This bill requires that any course offered shall follow applicable laws maintaining religious neutrality, and shall not endorse, favor, promote, or show hostility to any particular religion, nonreligious faith or religious perspective.

This bill is similar to HB 267 (2019).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that no other sacred writings influenced the founders of this country as much as the Bible and that teaching these concepts provides a perspective that is essential to the preservation of freedom. This bill will reassure school districts that they have a legal standing when they choose to offer courses that focus on the religious scriptures in the public school setting.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Baker; Concerned Women For America Missouri; and Mary Byrne.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill creates an unnecessary Constitutional conflict by singling out one particular religious text which provides indirect coercion and seems to imply that other religions are not as significant. The state and public schools should not be picking winners and losers in matters of religious texts or courses.

Testifying against the bill were American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri and Brian Kaylor, Churchnet.