

SB 34 -- ELECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES COURSES ON THE BIBLE

SPONSOR: May (Baker)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on General Laws by a vote of 11 to 1, with 3 present. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Legislative Oversight by a vote of 7 to 2 with 1 present.

This bill allows a school district or public charter school to offer an elective social studies course relating, but not limited to, 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 society. No requirement shall be made by the district or charter school 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.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the Bible is a powerful tool in teaching culture and language. Forty-three other states currently allow the Bible to be used in courses in schools. The Bible is one of the most important and impactful pieces of literature ever produced; it is appropriate to use it as a teaching tool. There are many valuable non-spiritual principles in the Bible. The bill does not approach the Bible from a devotional perspective, but instead from a historical perspective.

Testifying in person for the bill were Senator May; and the Missouri Baptist Convention.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill is unnecessary and does not allow or empower schools to do anything they already do not have the power to do. Instead, this bill presents problematic messaging and may mislead educators and the public as to what is appropriate and legal behavior as it relates to using the Bible in the classroom. Further, this bill has problems by endorsing a specific, sectarian view of the Bible. This bill suffers from a basic misunderstanding of what the Bible truly is. There is no one universal Bible; instead, there are many different religious books that make up the Bible, and depending on a specific denomination, some books may be included while others excluded. There is no way to make the determination of which version of the Bible to use, and thus which books to include or exclude, without making a sectarian decision. While religion is important, it is the role of families and churches to teach religion to children, not public schools.

Testifying in person against the bill were Azhar Majeed, Center For Inquiry (CFI); Brian Kaylor, Word & Way; Arnie C. Dienoff.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that it is not possible for young people to know many of the basic tenants of our society without exposure to or learning from the Bible.

Testifying in person on the bill was Samuel H. Lee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under "House Testimony on Senate Bills" on the House website.