



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: SB 34		DATE: 4/4/2023	
COMMITTEE: General Laws			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
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The Jewish Community Relations Council supports this legislation. Our tradition teaches that to save a life is as if you have saved the whole world. This legislation expands coverages to women when they are the most vulnerable, during the time after the delivery a child. Please support SB 34



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL WESTEN		PHONE NUMBER:	
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EMAIL: MichaelWesten.3up@protonmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 4/2/2023 10:26 PM
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I support SB 34 as-is.			



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: TIMOTHY FABER		PHONE NUMBER: 573-480-2704	
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The Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament, and New Testament, have been foundational to art, literature, and civics and other aspects of Western Civilization. In many instances, a proper understanding of other works cannot be had without first having at least a cursory understanding or familiarity of the Scriptures. My Dad taught at McKinley High School in St. Louis from the late 60's to the mid 80's. Starting as an English teacher, he also served as drama coach, yearbook advisor, and eventually even head of the English Department, and he loved all things Mark Twain. But in the course of his years of teaching English he noticed many students were not able to relate to ideas and idioms used in British and American Literature; and that was a direct result of them not having any exposure to the Bible. He went through the proper processes and received permission to teach a course he designed called simply "The Bible as Literature". In that course they looked at Hebrew Poetry in the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. They looked at historical writings, at the epistolary form of writing letters in the first century Roman Empire, and more. The course was an elective course, but enough students signed up for it from year to year that he was able to keep teaching it until he retired. To my knowledge not a single student ever changed religions or became religious because of the course. But, according to my dad, many students were able to begin understanding other literature so much better – From Shakespeare to Twain and even more modern writers. It was the foundation they had been missing, and having gained that foundation their literary horizons were expanded exponentially. If this bill were requiring that the Bible be taught, or if this bill allowed for the Bible to be taught in a sectarian way, we would oppose it. But as an elective, and as being taught in a non-sectarian manner, this is worthy of implementing and I encourage each of you Representatives to vote in favor of its passage.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C."HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE		PHONE NUMBER:	
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I am opposed to this Bill. It Violated the State and Federal Constitution in the Separation of Church and State.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: AZHAR MAJEED		PHONE NUMBER: 202-734-6494	
REPRESENTING: CENTER FOR INQUIRY (CFI)		TITLE: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS	
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THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) writes to urge you to vote against S.B. 34, legislation that would authorize public schools in Missouri to offer Bible studies classes in clear contravention of the separation of church and state—a core tenet of American democracy. CFI is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing science, reason, and secularism in American law and public policy. We have numerous members and supporters in Missouri. S.B. 34 authorizes any school district in Missouri to provide its students with elective social studies courses “relating, but not limited to” the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament of the Bible, and the New Testament of the Bible. S.B. 34 expressly states that the purpose of such classes includes teaching students knowledge of “biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives.” While this provision is couched in terms of “understanding contemporary society and culture,” as discussed further below, it is clear that S.B. 34 views teaching students the content of the Bible as a good unto itself. Lastly, sections 4 and 5 of S.B. 34 provide that course contents will follow applicable law, maintain “religious neutrality,” refrain from endorsing or disfavoring a particular faith, and avoid violating the federal and state constitutions. However, as discussed further below, this amounts to little more than a “savings clause” that fails to remedy the bill’s substantial defects. Whether or not the courses offered pursuant to this bill are elective, it is fair to expect social pressure and coercion being placed on students to take Bible studies classes. When their friends and fellow students elect to take these courses, when parents and neighbors are extolling the virtues of this offering, and when teachers are discussing the perceived benefits of Bible study, it is likely that impressionable young people will want to follow suit. Schoolchildren already face many forms of peer pressure and societal pressure to which they may feel the need to conform. Adding to this problem with a religiously coercive element can only further harm students. Even if they do not wish to elect a Bible studies class, some students may be coerced by their religiously minded parents to do so. This, too, is inapposite in an educational climate that is supposed to nurture learning, the gathering of knowledge, and the fostering of critical thinking skills. Second, even in the case of elective courses, S.B. 34 allows for the use of public school resources toward religious instruction and proselytization. Whether or not any particular student chooses to enter a Bible studies class, S.B. 34 promotes an entanglement of state and religion that is fundamentally at odds with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Missouri already faces many challenges and shortcomings in its public schools, including the fact that approximately one in ten students attends a “low-performing school.” Missouri also has a documented issue with teacher retention, with a January 2023 report from the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education demonstrating that Missouri has the absolute lowest average starting salary for teachers in the country. According to that same report, only 38 percent of Missouri teachers complete a fifth year of teaching and continue onto a sixth year. Under

these circumstances, devoting precious resources, education time, and teaching staff to religious instruction in Missouri's public schools is extremely harmful. Third, offering Bible studies classes specifically—without any comparable offering of minority religion texts or atheist and humanist teachings—excludes a number of communities. What message is likely to be sent to schoolchildren when only the texts of a particular faith are offered for social studies credit in their schools? The message, of course, is that the school district and the state are establishing a favored religion with their seal of approval. This is especially insulting to the roughly 20 percent of Missouri residents who self-identify as unaffiliated with any faith (also known as the religious “Nones”). Indeed, the Pew Research Center demonstrates that approximately 20 percent of adults in Missouri identify as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular.”⁴ S.B. 34 effectively marginalizes these communities by favoring a “preferred” set of religious beliefs. For all the above reasons, CFI urges this committee to vote against S.B. 34. Thank you for your time.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: BRIAN KAYLOR		PHONE NUMBER:	
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My name is Brian Kaylor. I am the editor-in-chief of Word&Way, a Christian magazine publishing in Missouri since 1896, and the associate director of Churchnet, a statewide Baptist network of churches. I oppose Senate Bill 34 not because I do not care about the Bible but precisely because I, as a Baptist minister, view the Bible as sacred. I cherish the strong Baptist heritage of standing for religious liberty for all, which includes a healthy separation of church and state. What troubles me about this bill is not only is it not needed to bring the Bible into a classroom to teach the historical or literary impact, but frankly what this bill pushes for cannot truly be implemented without violating the First Amendment. Let me give you three quick examples. First, singling out the Bible as the sole religious text worthy of study is the state already picking winners and losers when it comes to religion and faith. By encouraging the teaching of this text and not others, you are playing religious favorites. Second, which Bible do you mean? Do you mean the 66 books used by most Protestants or the 73 books used by the Roman Catholic Church or the 80 books used by the Orthodox Church of America or the 81 books used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church? If you pick one list, the state will be choosing winners and losers when it comes to religion and faith. But if you teach them all as books of the Bible, you will be similarly undermining the faith teachings of parents and churches that pick a particular list for profoundly important reasons. And while the text of the bill says students can choose whatever translation they want, the more important establishment question still comes as to which translation the teacher and textbook uses. Third, the supernatural parts of the Bible particularly create constitutional problems. One can probably teach the wisdom literature fairly easily within constitutional parameters, but what about the miracles of Jesus and the various prophets? If they are taught as supernatural acts, that would be sectarian. But equally problematic would be to undermine the historicity of those acts. Either way would be the state picking winners and losers when it comes to religion and faith. And that gets to the key issue. The Bible cannot be reduced to simply an elective social studies class. Yes, the Bible impacted literature, politics, society, and much more. But the Bible at its core is not merely influential literature. The Bible is the foundational text of my faith. It teaches me about God; it teaches me how to worship God and follow God's commands. And that is its whole purpose. The Bible is inherently religious and we cannot pretend otherwise. To strip away the sacredness of the text is not to treat it as good literature but to profane it. I do not need the state teaching my son how to read the Bible. I will do that. Our church will do that. If you teach the Bible the way I see it, that would be unconstitutional because it would be very sectarian. But if you teach it in ways that undermine what I and our church are teaching, that would also be the state picking winners and losers when it comes to religion and faith. Don't get me wrong. I wish we had more biblical literacy in our society. But teaching the Bible is not the job of the state; it is the job of families and churches. So, I respectfully urge a vote against this Senate Bill 34.



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WITNESS NAME			
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WITNESS NAME: BRITTANY WILLIAMS		PHONE NUMBER: 954-328-8877	
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April 3, 2023The Honorable Representative Alex RileyChair, House General Laws Committee201 West Capitol Ave.Jefferson City, Missouri 65101Re: **OPPOSE SB 34, Concerning Bible Classes in Public Schools**

Dear Chairperson Riley and Members of the House General Laws Committee:American Atheists, on behalf of its more than 1,000 constituents in Missouri, writes in opposition to SB 34, a bill which allows public schools to offer elective courses on the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament. This legislation is wasteful of public education resources, it puts schools at risk for liability, and it may result in religious coercion against Missouri students. Therefore, we strongly urge you to oppose this harmful legislation. American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. As advocates for religious liberty, American Atheists believes that no young person should be subject to religious coercion by the government.While high school courses focusing on the historical or literary aspects of the Bible are not intrinsically unconstitutional, they are certainly wasteful of scarce educational resources and, moreover, put schools in dangerous legal territory. The Constitution places strict requirements on such courses, and schools are frequently unable or unwilling to meet those requirements. These courses often serve merely as a veneer to engage in proselytization in public schools. The Bible has had a significant impact on Western literature, art, and history, so teaching about it can serve a constitutional purpose. In fact, teachers in Missouri may already use it for this purpose. However, courts have clarified that the First Amendment requires that any course teaching about the Bible:Must be taught in a non devotional manner, with no attempt made to indoctrinate students as to either the truth or falsity of biblical materials;Must not include the teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible;Must not teach the Bible as a true and literal historic record; andShould expose students to critical perspectives on the Bible and a diversity of biblical interpretations.In 2017, the state of Kentucky passed HB 128, which mandated elective Bible classes in Kentucky schools. The ACLU conducted a case study on the implementation of these elective courses and determined that the majority of courses did not meet the constitutional requirements of being “objective, non devotional, and... not promot[ing] any specific religious view.” The ACLU concluded that the courses were being used to impose religious “life lessons and actively inculcate Christianity.” Further, a case study on Bible class curriculum in the state of Texas, conducted by Dr. Mark Chancey of Southern Methodist University, found numerous violations of the constitutional requirements clarified by Roberts v.

Madigan. This in-depth report concluded that: -Most Bible courses in Texas have teachers with no academic training in biblical, religious, or theological studies, and some were even taught by local clergy.-Most Bible courses are taught as religious and devotional classes that promote one faith perspective over all others.-Most Bible courses advocate an ideological agenda that is hostile to religious freedom, science, and public education itself. Similarly, a 2000 study by People for the American Way (PFAW) demonstrates that "Bible History" courses taught in Florida from 1996–1999 were usually "taught from a Christian, generally Fundamentalist Protestant, perspective, and typically, the courses presented the Bible as a history textbook, assumed that students were Christian, and used the Bible to promote Christian faith formation." PFAW's study resulted in the state of Florida removing the existing courses. The bill text states a course offered "shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective," and proponents assert that would protect religious freedom in schools. However, they ignore the fact that the bill is inherently antagonistic toward the religious freedom of anyone who is not Christian. This bill shows clear favoritism for Christian students and beliefs because it makes no mention of offering courses about minority religions, nor courses on secular philosophy. If SB 34 is passed, Missouri schools that offer these electives in Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament will face scrutiny in the implementation of the Bible course curriculum. The current legislation does not provide any effective safeguards to protect the First Amendment rights of students subject to religious coercion. Nor does the legislation provide mechanisms to ensure that schools will meet constitutionally required standards. These factors put school districts that offer Bible classes under this legislation at substantial risk for liability. Taxpayer dollars should fund public education, not be wasted on efforts to indoctrinate students, nor to defend such unconstitutional indoctrination in court. SB 34 would needlessly waste education resources, put school districts at risk, and leave students in Missouri unprotected from religious coercion. We strongly urge you to vote against this unnecessary and controversial bill. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' opposition to SB 34, please contact me at bwilliams@atheists.org. Very truly yours, Brittany Williams
State Policy Counsel
American Atheists
cc: All Members of the Missouri House General Laws Committee



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SCOTT MCKELLAR		PHONE NUMBER:	
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We know what will happen if this bill becomes law -- the same thing that always happens when states try this. Some teachers will turn their classrooms into state-sponsored Sunday schools. They will download curricular material from religious websites, complete with devotionals, prayers, and proselytizing. Christianity will be promoted, with all the august authority of the state, at the expense of other beliefs and non-belief. If the class treats the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, it will obviously violate the Establishment Clause. If it treats the Bible as anything less, it will violate the Free Exercise Clause by denying somebody's sincerely held beliefs. The only way to win is to not play the game.



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WITNESS NAME			
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WITNESS NAME: SUSAN GIBSON		PHONE NUMBER:	
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Religion does not belong in schools.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SAMUEL H. LEE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:		SUBMIT DATE: 4/4/2023 12:00 AM
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