

SS SCS SBs 49 & 118 -- ALLOWS SCHOOLS TO EMPLOY OR ACCEPT CHAPLAINS AS VOLUNTEERS

SPONSOR: Black

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 12 to 6 with 2 voting present. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative by a vote of 7 to 1.

This bill specifies that a school chaplain can not be employed in any position that requires a teaching certificate unless the chaplain is a certified teacher. A school chaplain must be a member of a Department of Defense listed religious-endorsing organization recognized by the Armed Forces Chaplains Board.

The bill requires a background to be conducted on any school chaplain prior to the chaplain's commencement of employment or volunteer service. A school district or charter school must not employ or accept as a volunteer any chaplain who is required to be registered as a sex offender under current law.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that other government agencies have chaplains and that there is a large demand for additional counseling services in schools. The current Department of Defense list does not include particular groups that might be concerning. This bill provides a voluntary option for districts and in other states where this has been implemented there has been a significant decrease in teen pregnancy, violence, and suicides. Most of the chaplains in Missouri are Christian with very few being of any other ideology.

Testifying in person for the bill were Senator Black; Senator Moon; Timothy Faber; and Jerry Angelo.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that there are potential first amendment concerns as this does come close to the line of providing public funds for religion. This language also creates concerns for mandated reporting laws as those may be in conflict with the protected status of religious confessions. While chaplains are good for certain circumstances concern would be if they began to proselyte.

Testifying in person against the bill was Dava-Leigh Brush, Missouri Equity Educational Partnership.

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