



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM**

BILL NUMBER: <b>HB 1262</b>		DATE: <b>3/26/2025</b>	
COMMITTEE: <b>Elementary and Secondary Education</b>			
<b>TESTIFYING:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>ARNIE C."HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>arniedienoff@yahoo.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/26/2025 11:45 PM</b>

**THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.**

**I am in Support of this Bill and Legislation. This Legislation cannot mandate that students are forced to talk about Religion. These activities shall be on a voluntary basis only.**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>DEANNA RHODES-WIDMER</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/26/2025 12:00 AM</b>
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>JOANNE SCHRADER</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>crazyhorse1876@gmail.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/24/2025 11:48 PM</b>

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This affirms that students have the right to the free exercise of religion voluntarily and on their own time at school. I have always said prayer is permitted in public schools as long as it is student led and not mandated. So many people misunderstand that and think that religion is entirely forbidden.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>OTTO FAJEN</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-634-3202</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>MISSOURI NEA</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>1810 E. ELM ST.</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/26/2025 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>TIMOTHY FABER</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>tfaber@mobaptist.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/26/2025 9:49 AM</b>
<b>THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.</b>			

This is a great piece of legislation and I commend Representative Black for bringing it forth. When I was a student at Union High School (Union, MO) in the early 1980's I would read my Bible for a bit during lunch break. Before long, a few friends began joining me and we would simply discuss what we had been reading. As often happens among high school students. Though, others began to mock us and jeer at us. Soon, the assistant principle (Mr. Sandoval) came to us and told us we could no longer read and discuss the Bible during lunch as it was "disruptive to the other students". TO THE OTHER STUDENTS! They were the ones mocking and jeering, but we (my friends and I) were the ones who had our rights suppressed..... If only I knew then what I know now! But that's the thing, high school students often are not aware of their rights, and will typically do as their school administrators tell them. And – as in Mr. Sandoval's case – there are also school administrators who may not understand, or care, what the students' rights are. This piece of legislation is not advocating for any particular religion. It is simply informing students, and reminding staff and faculty, that the freedom of religion does not stop at the school door, and re-enforces the fact that many subjects cannot be discussed void of the religious factors surrounding them – such as the crusades, the founding of our nation, the origins of life, etc. Every person has a worldview, and every topic is discussed from a certain worldview, and each worldview is determined by a person's religious beliefs and background. To attempt to teach or discuss any subject void of religion is to intentionally void that discuss of vital components.....So yes, HB1262 deserves your full support.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>DAVID A.ROSMAN</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>David.Rosman@atheists.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/25/2025 6:13 PM</b>
<b>THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.</b>			

The freedom of religion sections written into the proposed legislation does not seem to comply with Article 1 Section5 of the Missouri state constitution. The language used usually indicates that school officials, teachers and other who have direct contact with students may attempt to indoctrinate the students into their religious beliefs, usually one of the many sects of Christianity. This is contrary to the beliefs of non-Christians, agnostics, atheist and other non-believers.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>JERE HOCHMAN</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>jhstlnt@gmail.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/26/2025 3:07 PM</b>
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The items cited in the bill ARE ALREADY IN LAW. A Missouri district Supreme Court case allows for before/after school religious clubs. Teaching ABOUT religions (vs. teaching religion) is allowed and valuable as the more one understands about another, respect can follow (although that would be diversity training as defined by some). Students can pray, given designated places to pray on particular religious holy day, and other support. POSTING the rights is VAGUE. The WORDING and pictures on a "posting" could also serve to PROMOTE a religious or type of beliefs. Do we require the posting of the BILL OF RIGHTS? The PREAMBLE to the CONSTITUTION (separate from posters in history classrooms)? Do require posting of a student's rights if asked about their religion, race, gender, birthplace? Do require posting of a student's rights when being questioned by authorities. This is not a problem is "broke" and needs fixing.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>MICKY DOLLENS</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>608-256-8900</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>PO BOX 750</b>			
CITY: <b>MADISON</b>		STATE: <b>WI</b>	ZIP: <b>53701</b>
EMAIL: <b>dollensm@ffrf.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/25/2025 4:07 PM</b>

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March 25, 2025Submitted via Missouri House of Representative website The Hon. Ed LewisChair, House Elementary and Secondary Education CommitteeMissouri House of Representatives201 West Capitol AvenueJefferson City, MO 65101Re: Testimony in Opposition to HB 1262Dear Chair Lewis and Members of the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee:I am writing on behalf of the FFRF Action Fund (FFRF AF) to express strong opposition to Senate Bill 433. FFRF AF is the advocacy affiliate of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national nonprofit with over 40,000 members, working to uphold the constitutional separation between church and state.HB 1262 requires every public school in Missouri to post a statement outlining students' and employees' religious liberties, framed as the "Missouri Religious Liberty in Schools Awareness Act." While it may appear harmless, the bill is constitutionally unnecessary and ideologically charged.Students and school employees already enjoy full First Amendment protections. They can pray, read religious texts, form clubs, and express their beliefs—so long as it doesn't disrupt instruction. HB 1262 falsely implies these rights are under threat, when in fact they're well established and actively protected.HB 1262 only talks about students' right to express their religion, but it leaves out something just as important: the right to not have religion pushed on them by their school. Courts have consistently affirmed that public schools must remain neutral on matters of faith—not sponsor it, encourage it, or post performative reminders about it.This bill isn't about awareness; it's about advancing a religious agenda under the banner of civic education. If the true goal is informing students of their rights, that's best accomplished through unbiased instruction, not wall posters steeped in religious overtones.I urge you to vote no on HB 1262 and uphold true religious freedom for all Missouri students, teachers, and their families.Thank you for your consideration.Sincerely,Mickey DollensRegional Government Affairs ManagerFFRF Action Fund





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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>VICTORIA ANDERSON</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>AMERICAN ATHEISTS</b>		TITLE: <b>STATE POLICY SPECIALIST</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>225 CRISTIANI STREET</b>			
CITY: <b>CRANFORD</b>		STATE: <b>NJ</b>	ZIP: <b>07016</b>
EMAIL: <b>vanderson@atheists.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>3/26/2025 9:27 AM</b>
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Dear Chairperson Lewis and Members of the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee: American Atheists, on behalf of its over 1,400 constituents in Missouri, writes in opposition to HB 1262, an unconstitutional bill that would grant special privileges to religious students in public schools by allowing them to engage in religious activities during class time at the expense of the education of other students. This would expose LGBTQ+ students, the nonreligious, and those who practice a religious minority faith up to state-sanctioned discrimination by fostering an environment that invites for religious coercion. We strongly urge you to reject this harmful bill. 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 atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where 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. American Atheists believes that no young person should be subject to religious coercion by the government. HB 1262 is a transparent attempt to give Christian students and teachers license to proselytize on campus while disregarding others’ right to be free from religious coercion. This bill conflates the fundamental right to religious freedom with the nonexistent right to be free from the social consequences of imposing unwelcome behavior on others; it seeks to redefine religious freedom as the ability to engage in coercive activity under the guise of free speech. If enacted, HB 1262 would give Christian students and teachers the unfettered ability to use religious belief in order to justify harassment and discrimination against vulnerable members of Missouri’s public schools while failing to protect the religious freedom of all non-Christians and atheists. Simply put, this bill would entrench religion within one of the nation’s most important institutions — publicly funded, nonsectarian schools — and create an impermissible risk of religious coercion. It undermines America’s understanding of religious freedom and willfully ignores our country’s long history of religious pluralism in favor of privileging a single religious perspective. Our nation was founded upon the principle that religion and government should remain in separate spheres to ensure all Americans’ religious beliefs are respected. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment requires that the government not favor one religion over another or elevate religious belief over nonbelief to prevent religious coercion and allow each individual to freely practice their faith — or lack thereof. In other words, the fundamental right of religious freedom includes the right to not be subjected to unwanted religious proselytization. What religious freedom does not include, however, is the right to subject others to unwanted evangelizing, to harass others under the guise of religious belief, or to be free from the social consequences that naturally follow unwelcome conversion attempts. The constitutional guardrails provided by the First Amendment are

especially critical when children are involved, as they are particularly vulnerable to religious coercion within educational settings. The United States Supreme Court has noted that, when it comes to the education of our children, the government should be “particularly vigilant” to ensure schools do not promote religious views that may conflict with the religious beliefs of students and their families. This includes laws or policies that allow schools to direct students in activities which espouse a sectarian point of view. The Supreme Court has additionally made clear that students are free to engage in voluntary, nondisruptive religious expression in school, but schools are not constitutionally permitted to promote specific religious beliefs without violating the nation’s long history and tradition of religious freedom. HB 1262’s vague language allows for impermissibly broad interpretations and creates an environment ripe for state-supported proselytization in violation of the First Amendment. It lacks sufficient safeguards to protect against religious coercion or otherwise ensure that all students’ religious freedom rights are respected. For example, the provision which allows teachers to “discuss the influence of religion on history and culture” could easily be used as a loophole for introducing their religious beliefs into the classroom so long as they can provide some historical justification. This is precisely the type of impermissible religious coercion the Supreme Court warned against in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, as public school students would be constantly subjected to religious expression by authority figures regardless of whether the student wishes to receive that messaging. Additionally, HB 1262 creates opportunities for students to use classroom assignments as vehicles for proselytization by allowing them to “express [their] beliefs about religion in a classroom assignment.” While students already have the right to include religious expression in their schoolwork, schools must be able to establish limits. The expression must be responsive to the assignment, and the school is required to prohibit any expression that infringes on the rights of other students. Students cannot use book reports, class presentations, or any other classroom activity to subject others to unwanted proselytization. This bill, however, would permit such behavior and leave the other students little recourse through which they could assert their First Amendment right to be free from religious coercion. Even more concerning, HB 1262 would place a target on the backs of LGBTQ+ children, religious minorities, and nonreligious students by allowing their classmates to harass or bully them under the guise of religious expression. These children are particularly vulnerable to religion-based harassment and discrimination, especially in predominantly Christian school districts. Although this bill purports to protect religious liberty, it would actively undermine for every student who does not adhere to the majority faith practiced in their school. Missouri lawmakers should not single out vulnerable children by purposefully encouraging unconstitutional and exclusionary religious activities in schools. Finally, if this bill were passed, Missouri schools would be forced into an impossible situation where they could neither prevent a student from evangelizing to their classmates nor allow evangelizing because it would infringe upon the religious liberty of other students. Both paths would be unlawful, either under the Constitution or Missouri state law, and schools would be held liable for failing to adhere to unworkable requirements. By deliberately blurring the line of schools’ constitutional duties regarding religion, HB 1262 removes any possibility for a school to avoid expensive and unnecessary litigation at taxpayers’ expense. Taxpayer dollars should fund public education, not be wasted on efforts to protect religious coercion or defend unconstitutional indoctrination in court. HB 1262 is a blatant attempt to impermissibly inject religion into Missouri’s education system. Public schools should be a place where every child is welcome and can receive a quality education — not a place where children can be subjected to state-sanctioned religious indoctrination. We urge you to protect the religious freedom of all students by rejecting this bill. Should you have any questions regarding American Atheists’ opposition to HB 1262, please contact me at [vanderson@atheists.org](mailto:vanderson@atheists.org). Sincerely, Victoria Anderson  
State Policy Specialist  
American Atheists