



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 1792		DATE: 2/24/2026	
COMMITTEE: Children and Families			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. A.C. "HONEST ABE" DIENOFF		PHONE NUMBER: 314-440-9000	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MISSOURI STATE PUBLIC ADVOCACY		TITLE: STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 1535			
CITY: O'FALLON		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63366
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 12:00 AM	
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: CHAD STEBBINS		PHONE NUMBER: 417-438-2181
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI PRESS ASSOCIATION		TITLE:
ADDRESS: 802 LOCUST		
CITY: COLUMBIA		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 65201
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:		
WITNESS NAME: JENNIFER BALDWIN		PHONE NUMBER: 573-893-4155
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MISSOURI ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS		TITLE:
ADDRESS: 124 1/2 EAST HIGH STREET		
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 65101
EMAIL: info@maslonline.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/22/2026 3:46 PM

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The Missouri Association of School Librarians (MASL) fully supports HB 1792 "The Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Act". Media literacy is an essential skill for navigating information for all Missouri students. Students demonstrating media literacy know how to leverage media to their advantage. They balance their usage, manage their digital footprint, and protect their own privacy/data. They oversee their own intellectual property and responsibly interact with the intellectual property of others. They use media to contribute positively in an online environment. As information specialists, school librarians are uniquely qualified to teach these skills. The pilot program created by HB 1792, supported by the framework of school librarians' pedagogy, would ensure that Missouri students have access to these important life skills.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: JULIE SMITH		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 7:18 AM
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I have been teaching media literacy classes at the high school and university level since 1997. Back then, we talked about how TV reflected society and how women were portrayed in magazine ads. Media literacy was an elective, something "extra". Fast forward to 2026, and now students are faced with algorithms, irresponsible social media platforms, echo chambers, malinformation, AI-created slop, chatbot relationships, shortened attention spans, body dysmorphia, et al. The average American spends nearly 11 hours a day consuming mass media, but no one talks about it. How can we survive as a society when it's so difficult to tell what is real, meaningful, valid or true? How can we survive as genuine humans when our value is placed on what the black screen tells us? This bill is a great **START** to help students recognize not only how they use the media but how the media use **THEM**.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL HARRIS		PHONE NUMBER: 615-202-3579	
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION		TITLE: GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS MANAGER	
ADDRESS: 420 S 6TH STREET			
CITY: COLUMBIA		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65205
EMAIL: mharris@msta.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 7:47 AM	
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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: OTTO FAJEN		PHONE NUMBER: 573-634-3202	
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI NEA		TITLE: DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE POLICY	
ADDRESS: 1810 EAST ELM ST.			
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65101
EMAIL: otto.fajen@mnea.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 9:30 AM	
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The bill would require DESE to create a media literacy and critical thinking pilot program. The program will address media literacy, develop strategies for student learning in classroom curricula, and demonstrate various literacy strategies used. The Association supports the bill.



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WITNESS NAME		
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:		
WITNESS NAME: BYRON KEELIN		PHONE NUMBER: 314-402-0655
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: FREEDOM PRINCIPLE		TITLE: PRESIDENT
ADDRESS: PO BOX 2		
CITY: BALLWIN	STATE: MO	ZIP: 63022
EMAIL: freedomprinciplemo@protonmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 6:52 AM

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While we understand and appreciate the intent behind HB 1792—to equip students with essential media literacy and critical thinking skills in an increasingly digital world—we are concerned that the bill, as written, lacks significant guidelines or protections against anti-American bias in its implementation.

By placing full oversight of this program with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and with many educators affiliated with the NEA (National Education Association), there is a real risk that classroom instruction could be leveraged by NEA-backed teachers to promote ideologically driven content. Without clear safeguards, this legislation opens the door for indoctrination, rather than true education, by those who may hold anti-American views.

To ensure that all perspectives—especially those aligned with foundational American values—are respected and represented, HB 1792 must include specific guidelines protecting against partisan or anti-American bias in both curriculum development and classroom instruction. Otherwise, there is a danger that this well-intentioned bill could further enable NEA-driven, anti-American influence in our schools.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: EMILY STOINSKI		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 2/23/2026 9:33 PM
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My name is Emily Stoinski, and I am a registered Missouri voter. I am writing today in the moment in opposition to HB 1792 until there is more information. On paper, I agree with the majority of the priorities of this proposed program. However, I would like more information to the public on who develops this program and how to ensure that it is not partisan. I see public offices putting out AI images, false statements, etc., and I am concerned that this bill will perpetuate harm and false information. Please provide more information on who will be creating this program and who wrote this bill.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: SARAH BERRY		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/24/2026 8:24 AM

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HB 1792 creates a statutory “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Pilot Program.”

**The threshold question is not whether media literacy is valuable. It is:
 Why does this require statute rather than administrative policy?**

1?? Curriculum Authority Already Exists

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) already possesses authority to:

- Issue curriculum guidance**
- Develop pilot initiatives**
- Provide professional development**
- Study instructional outcomes**

Nothing in current law prohibits DESE from launching a voluntary media literacy pilot through policy.

If this can be done administratively, codifying it in statute suggests something more permanent or regulatory is intended.

2?? Legislative Entrenchment

- Once enacted in statute:**
- The program becomes politically embedded**
- Future adjustments require legislative action**
- “Pilot” language may function as a precursor to statewide standards**

Section 9 explicitly contemplates drafting “proposed clear, inclusive media literacy and critical thinking state standards.”

That signals this is not merely exploratory — it is foundational.

If the goal is experimentation, administrative flexibility is preferable.

3?? Vagueness and Future Expansion

The bill introduces broad concepts such as:

“Misinformation”

“Propaganda”

“Rhetoric that incites violence”

“Digital ethics”

These are inherently subjective categories.

Embedding them in statute elevates them beyond instructional tools and into legislative endorsement of undefined standards.

Before legislating such terms, clarity should precede codification.

4?? Law vs. Policy

Statutes should be reserved for:

Structural governance changes

Funding mandates

Regulatory enforcement frameworks

This bill does none of those.

It establishes a temporary pilot program that DESE could implement today without new law.

Conclusion:

If media literacy is educationally beneficial, DESE may pursue it through policy.

If it requires legislative authorization, the General Assembly should clearly articulate:

What gap in current law prevents implementation

Why statutory codification is necessary

Whether the long-term intent is statewide standards adoption

Absent such justification, this bill elevates a discretionary instructional initiative into statutory law without demonstrated necessity.

Legislative Notice:

The General Assembly is placed on notice that codifying broad and undefined media-content evaluation standards in statute, rather than implementing them administratively, risks future constitutional challenges if such standards evolve into viewpoint-based regulation of student speech. Careful delineation between policy guidance and statutory mandate is advised.