

By: Representative Miles

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 1403

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-13-161, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
2 TO REQUIRE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO OFFER A SECULAR PROGRAM OF
3 EDUCATION TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHICH INCLUDES ELECTIVE COURSES
4 RELATING TO RELIGION, HEBREW SCRIPTURES AND THE BIBLE; AND FOR
5 RELATED PURPOSES.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

7 **SECTION 1.** Section 37-13-161, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
8 amended as follows:

9 37-13-161. (1) (a) In addition to the curriculum otherwise
10 required by law or the State Board of Education to be taught in
11 the public schools of this state, the school board of each school
12 district shall require a secular program of education on religion
13 and the Bible to be taught in the high schools in that district.
14 The program of education must include an objective study of
15 religion and an objective study of the Bible, including, but not
16 limited to: a course on the Hebrew Scriptures and Old Testament
17 of the Bible; a course on the New Testament of the Bible; and a
18 course that is a combined study of the Hebrew Scriptures and the
19 Old and New Testaments of the Bible. A student enrolled in a



20 course offered under this section may not be required to use a
21 specific translation of the Hebrew Scriptures or Bible as the sole
22 text for the course.

23 (b) A course offered under this section must be offered
24 as an elective course for students in Grades 9 through 12 and must
25 be compliant with all state and federal laws, regulations and
26 policies, judicial opinions, and guidelines requiring public
27 schools to maintain religious neutrality and to accommodate the
28 diverse religious views, traditions and perspectives of all
29 students in the school. A course may not endorse, favor or
30 disfavor, promote or show hostility toward a particular religion,
31 religious perspective or nonreligious faith, and all instruction
32 must comply with the prohibition on doctrinal, sectarian or
33 denominational teaching contained in Section 37-13-3.

34 (2) Nothing in this code shall be construed to prevent any
35 local school board, in its discretion, from allowing references to
36 religion or references to or the use of religious literature,
37 history, art, music or other things having a religious
38 significance in courses other than those required to be taught in
39 the public schools of such school district under subsection (1),
40 when such references or uses do not constitute aid to any
41 religious sect or sectarian purpose and when such references or
42 uses are incidental to or illustrative of matters properly
43 included in the course of study.



44 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
45 and after July 1, 2019.

