

By: Senator(s) McMahan, Williams, Caughman

To: Constitution;
Accountability, Efficiency,
Transparency

SENATE BILL NO. 2789

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-13-161, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
2 TO REQUIRE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO TEACH RELIGION, HEBREW SCRIPTURES
3 AND THE BIBLE IN HISTORY AND ETHICS COURSES DURING THE MONTH OF
4 APRIL; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

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

8 37-13-161. (1) (a) In addition to the curriculum otherwise
9 required by law or the State Board of Education to be taught in
10 the public schools of this state, the school board of each school
11 district shall require a secular program on religion and the Bible
12 to be taught in high school ethics and history classes during the
13 month of April. The program of education must include an
14 objective study of religion and an objective study of the Bible,
15 including, but not limited to: a course on the Hebrew Scriptures
16 and Old Testament of the Bible; a course on the New Testament of
17 the Bible; and a course that is a combined study of the Hebrew
18 Scriptures and the Old and New Testament of the Bible. A student
19 enrolled in an ethics or history class that teaches this program



20 may not be required to use a specific translation of the Hebrew
21 Scriptures or Bible as the sole text of the course.

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

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

43 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
44 and after July 1, 2021.

