



Bill would replace - Lexington Herald-Leader (KY) - January 17, 2020 - page 4A

January 17, 2020 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY) | Valarie Honeycutt Spears; Staff Writer | Page 4A

Approximately 10 to 15 school districts in Kentucky are currently offering **Bible** literacy courses, but a **bill** introduced in the 2020 General Assembly **would replace** them **with** classes on 'various **religious texts**' of the many religions practiced in the state.

State Rep. McKenzie Cantrell, D-Louisville, said she introduced House **Bill** 243 this week after hearing from the leader of a large Buddhist temple in the district that she serves.

The **bill** calls for "an elective social studies **course** on the various **religious texts** of the many religions practiced in the Commonwealth" replacing language in the current law allowing an elective social studies class on the Hebrew scriptures, Old Testament of the **Bible**, and New Testament of the **Bible**.

Cantrell said when the General Assembly authorized **Bible** literacy courses in 2017, there was an amendment to include other **religious texts** in the courses, but the amendment failed.

"I am a Christian but represent families of many faiths in a diverse area in the south end of Louisville," Cantrell told the Herald-Leader.

Cantrell said Rev. Thich Hang Dat of Louisville's Buddha Bless Temple reached out to her **with his concerns** about the legislation that was approved in 2017.

"I am, of **course**, happy to listen and serve all constituents, so that was the genesis of the **bill**," she said.

Dat said public schools should teach other non-Christian **religious** courses besides the **Bible**.

"It's unfair for ...non-Christian students in the public schools because their parents pay taxes and we have to treat every student equally," he said.

Corey Shapiro, the legal director of ACLU of Kentucky, said his organization obtained the estimated numbers of school districts offering **bible** literacy courses last summer through the Kentucky Open Records Act and found that between 10 and 15 planned to offer courses in the 2019-20 school year.

School districts can teach about religions if they are doing it in an academic and neutral way, Shapiro said.

"What's inappropriate is when they start shaping children's **religious** beliefs. That's best left to one's family and people of faith and not in the public schools," he said. "Public school classes should be teaching students an understanding about religion but not championing any specific religion or promoting any specific faith."

Shapiro said he was still reviewing House **Bill 243**, "but any effort to expose students to diverse viewpoints on **religious** issues is certainly welcome."

Rev. Kent Gilbert, the president of the Kentucky Council of Churches, said in general his group is in favor of the broadening of the **texts** to include the "broad diversity of **religious** traditions" in the state that House **Bill 243** calls for.

In the overall scope of things, Gilbert said, the organization doesn't think its fair to put public school teachers in the position of teaching **religious texts**. Council members spoke against the **Bible literacy course** legislation in 2017.

"**Religious** education ought to be done by **religious** professionals," Gilbert said.

CITATION (APA STYLE)

Honeycutt Spears, V. (2020, January 17). Bill would replace Bible course with more religious texts. *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, p. 4A. Available from NewsBank: Access World News: <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/17889E7BB2710E30>.

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