



U.S.

MISSOURI HOUSE PASSES BILL ALLOWING PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO TEACH BIBLE COURSES

BY **CHRISTINA ZHAO** ON 3/26/19 AT 11:20 PM EDT

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The Missouri House this week passed a bill that would allow public schools in the state to teach elective social studies courses on the Bible.

The bill, sponsored by state Representative Ben Baker was passed by the Republican-led House with a 95-52 vote on Monday, according to [The Associated Press](#), and awaits passage by the Senate.

The bill would allow Missouri public schools to offer Bible classes to their students as an elective, although institutions cannot make the courses mandatory. It also requires state education officials to set clear guidelines and standards if they chose to offer classes on the Old and New Testament.

Baker, a minister and dean of students at Ozark Bible College, said the proposal was intended to clarify existing law, which had been inconsistently interpreted across the state to signal that Bible classes were prohibited.

"The Bible is simply a part of the fabric of life," Baker told the Missouri House Special Committee on Student Accountability last month, before they voted to advance the bill. Baker did not immediately respond to *Newsweek's* request for comment.

Christian activists and other supporters of the bill pointed to the Bible's significance in global history and Western values to justify teaching it in public schools. "The Koran doesn't come up in the plays of Shakespeare," Chuck Stetson, founder of the Bible Literacy Project, told the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#).

Missouri Representative Vic Allred added: "I think any Bible study at the high school level is a great idea."

Opponents of the proposal argued that the measure appeared to prioritize Christianity above all other religions.

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During the committee meeting in February, Brian Kaylor, a Missouri Baptist Church pastor who strongly opposes the bill, said that the Bible "cannot be reduced" to a school elective course. "I oppose this legislation, not because I oppose the Bible," Kaylor said, according to the *Post-Dispatch*. "The Bible cannot be reduced to merely an elective high school class. The Bible is inherently religious, and we cannot pretend otherwise."

Missouri is just one of several U.S. states where lawmakers have proposed to allow Bible courses in public schools. President Donald Trump [tweeted](#) his support of the bills in January, writing: "Numerous states introducing Bible Literacy classes, giving students the option of studying the Bible. Starting to make a turn back? Great!"