

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2020 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 38

BY SENATORS AZINGER, CLINE, AND MAYNARD

[Introduced January 8, 2020; referred
to the Committee on Education; and then to the
Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
 2 designated §18-2-9a, relating to requiring all schools provide an elective course on
 3 Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible, or New Testament of the Bible; stating a
 4 purpose; permitting students to use a translation of their choice; requiring teacher
 5 certification; and requiring federal and state laws be followed regarding religious neutrality
 6 while accommodating the diverse religious views of students.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

§18-2-9a. Elective courses of instruction on the Bible.

1 (a) In all public, private, parochial and denominational schools located within this state
 2 there shall be given:

3 (1) An elective social studies course on the Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible;

4 (2) An elective social studies course on the New Testament of the Bible; or

5 (3) An elective social studies course on the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament of
 6 the Bible.

7 (b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:

8 (1) Teach students knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that
 9 are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including literature, art,
 10 music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and

11 (2) Familiarize students with, as applicable:

12 (A) The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

13 (B) The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

14 (C) The literary style and structure of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and

15 (D) The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament on law, history,
 16 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

17 (c) A student may not be required to use a specific translation as the sole text of the

18 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation
19 of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the county board or school.

20 (d) The State Department of Education shall include the course standards in the program
21 of studies for West Virginia schools, including the teacher qualifications and required professional
22 development.

23 (e) A course offered under this section shall follow applicable law and all federal and state
24 guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views,
25 traditions, and perspectives of students in the school. A course under this section may not
26 endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or
27 nonreligious faith or religious perspective. The State Board of Education, in complying with this
28 section, shall not violate any provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, the West
29 Virginia Constitution or any state law, or any administrative regulations of the United States
30 Department of Education or the State Department of Education.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to require all schools provide an elective course on Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible or New Testament of the Bible. The bill states a purpose. The bill permits students to use a translation of their choice. The bill requires teacher certification. The bill requires federal and state laws be followed regarding religious neutrality while accommodating the diverse religious views of students.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.