

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2020 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4780

FISCAL
NOTE

BY DELEGATES BARTLETT, D. JEFFRIES, FAST, P.

MARTIN, DEAN, C. MARTIN, PORTERFIELD, WAXMAN,

FOSTER, BUTLER AND RODIGHIERO

[Introduced February 10, 2020; Referred to the

Committee on Education]

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 permitting a school-based decision-making council
3 created pursuant to rules adopted by the State Board of Education to offer students in
4 grade nine or above an elective social studies course on Hebrew Scriptures, Old
5 Testament of the Bible, New Testament of the Bible or Hebrew Scriptures of the Bible;
6 setting forth the purposes of the course; permitting students to use a translation of their
7 choice; requiring the State Board of Education to include course standards in the program
8 of studies for West Virginia schools, including the teacher qualifications and required
9 professional development; and imposing requirements applicable to the course and the
10 State Board of Education.

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) A school-based decision-making council created pursuant to rules to be promulgated
2 by the State Board of Education under §29A-3B-1 et seq. of this code may offer to students in
3 grade nine or above:
4 (1) An elective social studies course on the Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible;
5 (2) An elective social studies course on the New Testament of the Bible; or
6 (3) An elective social studies course on the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament of
7 the Bible.

8 (b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:
9 (1) Teach students knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that
10 are prerequisites to understanding the development of Americana society and culture, including
11 literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and
12 (2) Familiarize students with, as applicable:
13 (A) The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

14 (B) The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;
15 (C) The literary style and structure of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and
16 (D) The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament on law, history,
17 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

18 (c) A student may not be required to use a specific translation as the sole text of the
19 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation
20 of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the county board or school.

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

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

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to permit a school-based decision-making council created pursuant to rules adopted by the State Board of Education to offer students in grade nine or above an elective social studies course on Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible, New Testament of the Bible or Hebrew Scriptures of the Bible. The bill sets forth the purposes of the course. The bill permits students to use a translation of their choice. The bill requires the State Board of Education to include course standards in the program of studies for West Virginia schools, including the teacher qualifications and required professional development. The bill imposes requirements applicable to the course and the State Board of Education.

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