



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Senator Molly Baumgardner
Chair, Senate Education Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: OPPOSE HB 2236, Testimony from American Atheists in opposition to the co-called “Parents’ Bill of Rights”

Dear Chairperson Baumgardner and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

American Atheists on behalf of its constituents in Kansas writes in opposition to HB 2236, this bill would give fringe parents veto power over nearly every aspect of the school environment, at the expense of students. Under the pretext of a concern for “parents’ rights,” this bill creates a host of new burdens on teachers, students, and parents. We strongly urge you to reject this harmful bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. Religious liberty is an individual right guaranteed by the First Amendment, and American Atheists opposes efforts to misuse these constitutional protections to undermine the civil rights or religious freedom of others.

HB 2236 is particularly harmful in that this bill allows parents to opt their children out of any classes or instruction based on the parents’ “sincerely held beliefs, values, or principles.” For example, a parent might opt a student out of biology classes (if they have religious objections to evolution), history classes (if they disagree with the characterization of the US Civil War), geography (if they believe the Earth is flat), or even math (if they agree with the language in the Bible that implies π is 3). This is no way to run a school – and it would be a nightmare for teachers and administrators.

Kansas’s public schools are meant to be safe and welcoming for all students. Lawmakers should not manufacture “parent’s rights” that endanger students or strip away their civil rights. We strongly urge you to reject this unnecessary and harmful bill. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists’ opposition to HB 2236, please contact me by email at bwilliams@atheists.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BW', written in a cursive style.

Brittany Williams
State Policy Counsel
American Atheists

CC: All members of the Senate Education Committee