

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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403 S. WEST ROAD
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BILL RHILEY
80TH HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE

January 14, 2025

Chairwoman Susan Estes and Committee members

I am here to testify as a proponent of HB 2034

School Chaplains for Safer Schools

In September of 2023, a Texas bill was passed that allows school boards to hire chaplains, either as staff members or volunteers

It basically says the schools may employ or accept on a volunteer basis a chaplain to provide support, services, and programs for students as directed by the local school board.

Just to clarify the possible thought we are combining church and state. People have this confused, that has been a misinterpretation of Thomas Jefferson's letter to a church. It never was a law. We are not promoting a single state religion as was promoted by England over our colonies. We are providing another resource for schools to improve student education.

We have had chaplains serving since the founding of our country in our military, in hospitals, professional sports and in prisons, Unlike the Texas bill, this bill will not require Boards to make this decision by a certain date in order to get funding.

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In this bill, Chaplains will not be required to obtain a teaching license.

Chaplains shall be subject to the same criminal background checks as any other district employee.

Chaplains will not replace counselors or mental health workers.

Having Chaplains be mandated abuse reports is up to local school boards, but we are supportive.

A Chaplain is a certified clergy member who offers spiritual support. There are organizations such as the Chaplaincy Training Institute, the International Fellowship of Chaplains, the Chaplaincy Institute, the Chaplaincy Training Academy, The Institute for Clinical Pastoral Training, The Association of Certified Christian Chaplains and the National Association of Chaplains that could do that training.

Currently, there are 14 other states that have introduced similar bills.

With the decades long problems of bullying, lack of self-esteem, ptsd, depression, peer pressure, anxiety, and violence, Chaplains can help make schools safer.

Chaplains can benefit schools by promoting less drug use, less violence, and even result in fewer student suicides.

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We want the local school boards to be encouraged to use guidelines from certified chaplain associations instead of going through the state board so action is parent supported and local.

There is a sense that part of the mental health epidemic among students and staff has been a disconnect from spirituality.

In this era of conflict, discord, and loneliness, the role of a chaplain has never been more critical.

Trained school chaplains will shore up the severe shortage of counselors and mental health workers.

Chaplains will be in schools as a moral compass and a moral spiritual guide.

Finally, a quote from Kelley Tucker of the International Fellowship of Chaplains – “Chaplaincy is not about getting into a person’s head, but it’s about getting into their heart.”

With Respect

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Rhiley".