



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

February 4, 2026

The Honorable Sen. Renee Erickson
Chair, Senate Education Committee
300 SW 10th Avenue
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: OPPOSE SB 421, Allowing State-Sanctioned Religious Indoctrination in Public Schools

Dear Chairperson Erickson and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its constituents in Kansas, writes in opposition to SB 421, an unconstitutional bill that would grant special privileges to religious students in public schools by allowing them to engage in religious activities during class time at the expense of the education of other students. This would expose LGBTQ+ students, the nonreligious, and those who practice a religious minority faith up to state-sanctioned discrimination by fostering an environment that invites religious coercion. 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 atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where 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. American Atheists believes that no young person should be subject to religious coercion by the government.

SB 421 is a transparent attempt to give Christian students and teachers license to proselytize on campus while disregarding others’ right to be free from religious coercion. This bill conflates the fundamental right to religious freedom with the nonexistent right to be free from the social consequences of imposing unwelcome behavior on others; it seeks to redefine religious freedom as the ability to engage in

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coercive activity under the guise of free speech. If enacted, SB 421 would give Christian students and teachers the unfettered ability to use religious belief in order to justify harassment and discrimination against vulnerable members of Kansas's public schools while failing to protect the religious freedom of all non-Christians and atheists. Simply put, this bill would entrench religion within one of the nation's most important institutions – publicly funded, nonsectarian schools – and create an impermissible risk of religious coercion. It undermines America's understanding of religious freedom and willfully ignores our country's long history of religious pluralism in favor of privileging a single religious perspective.

Our nation was founded upon the principle that religion and government should remain in separate spheres to ensure all Americans' religious beliefs are respected. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment requires that the government not favor one religion over another or elevate religious belief over nonbelief to prevent religious coercion and allow each individual to freely practice their faith – or lack thereof. In other words, the fundamental right of religious freedom includes the right to not be subjected to unwanted religious proselytization.¹ What religious freedom does not include, however, is the right to subject others to unwanted evangelizing, to harass others under the guise of religious belief, or to be free from the social consequences that naturally follow unwelcome conversion attempts.

The constitutional guardrails provided by the First Amendment are especially critical when children are involved, as they are particularly vulnerable to religious coercion within educational settings.² The United States Supreme Court has noted that, when it comes to the education of our children, the government should be “particularly vigilant” to ensure schools do not promote religious views that may conflict with the religious beliefs of students and their families.³ This includes laws or policies that allow schools to direct students in activities which espouse a sectarian point of view. The Supreme Court has additionally made clear that students are free to engage in voluntary, nondisruptive religious expression in

¹ *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 52 (1985) (“Just as the right to speak and the right to refrain from speaking are complementary components of a broader concept of individual freedom of mind, so also the individual's freedom to choose his own creed is the counterpart of his right to refrain from accepting the creed established by the majority.”).

² See *Everson v. Bd. of Educ.*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 429-33 (1962); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 216 (1963); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968).

³ *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987).

school, but schools are not constitutionally permitted to promote specific religious beliefs without violating the nation's long history and tradition of religious freedom.

SB 421 creates opportunities for students to use classroom assignments as vehicles for proselytization by allowing them to “express[] religious, political, or ideological viewpoint[s] in a homework assignment, artwork, presentation, or other written or oral assignment.” While students already have the right to include religious expression in their schoolwork, schools must be able to establish limits. The expression must be responsive to the assignment, and the school is required to prohibit any expression that infringes on the rights of other students. Students cannot use book reports, class presentations, or any other classroom activity to subject others to unwanted proselytization. This bill, however, would permit such behavior and leave the other students little recourse through which they could assert their First Amendment right to be free from religious coercion.

Even more concerning, SB 421 would place a target on the backs of LGBTQ+ children, religious minorities, and nonreligious students by allowing their classmates to harass or bully them under the guise of religious expression. These children are particularly vulnerable to religion-based harassment and discrimination, especially in predominantly Christian school districts. Although this bill purports to protect religious liberty, it would actively undermine for every student who does not adhere to the majority faith practiced in their school. Kansas lawmakers should not single out vulnerable children by purposefully encouraging unconstitutional and exclusionary religious activities in schools.

Finally, if this bill were passed, Kansas schools would be forced into an impossible situation where they could neither prevent a student from evangelizing to their classmates nor allow evangelizing because it would infringe upon the religious liberty of other students. Both paths would be unlawful, either under the Constitution or Kansas state law, and schools would be held liable for failing to adhere to unworkable requirements. By deliberately blurring the line of schools' constitutional duties regarding religion, SB 421 removes any possibility for a school to avoid expensive and unnecessary litigation at taxpayers' expense. Taxpayer dollars should fund public education, not be wasted on efforts to protect religious coercion or defend unconstitutional indoctrination in court.

SB 421 is a blatant attempt to impermissibly inject religion into Kansas's education system. Public schools should be a place where every child is welcome and can receive a quality education — not a place where children can be subjected to state-sanctioned religious indoctrination. We urge you to protect the religious freedom of all students by rejecting this bill.

Should you have any questions regarding American Atheists' opposition to SB 421, please contact me at vanderson@atheists.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Victoria Anderson
State Policy Specialist
American Atheists