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HOUSE BILL NO. 1122

Offered January 8, 2020

Prefiled January 7, 2020

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-202.1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to public schools; electives on the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.

Patron—Robinson

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 22.1-202.1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 22.1-202.1. Comparative religion; Hebrew Scriptures; New Testament; elective courses.**

A. The Board of Education shall authorize local school boards to offer, as an elective in grades nine through 12 with appropriate credits toward graduation, a comparative religion class that focuses on the basic tenets, history, and religious observances and rites of world religions.

B. Local school boards shall offer as an elective in grades nine through 12 with appropriate credits toward graduation a course, either in a traditional classroom setting or in a virtual classroom setting, on (i) the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament of the Bible, (ii) the New Testament of the Bible, or (iii) a combined course on both. The Board of Education shall develop Standards of Learning and curriculum guidelines for such courses. The purpose of any such course is to introduce students to biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy. Each such course shall be designed to familiarize students with the contents, history, and literary style and structure of the relevant texts and their influence on law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

C. No student who participates in a course offered pursuant to subsection B shall be required to use a specific translation of a religious text as the sole textbook for the course, and a student may use a different translation from that chosen by the local school board.

D. Any course offered pursuant to subsection B shall follow all applicable state and federal laws and all state and federal guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views, traditions, and perspectives of enrolled students. No such course shall endorse, favor, promote, disfavor, or show hostility toward any particular religion or nonreligious perspective.

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