

House Bill 1226

By: Representatives Hilton of the 48th, Townsend of the 179th, Mathis of the 149th, Jones of the 25th, Ridley of the 22nd, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Subpart 2 of Part 1 of Article 16 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of
2 Georgia Annotated, relating to compulsory attendance, so as to provide for public school
3 students to be permitted to attend courses in religious moral instruction provided by a person
4 or organization independently of a public school, subject to certain conditions; to provide for
5 such conditions; to provide for students to receive academic credit for such courses; to
6 require local education agencies to adopt certain policies; to prohibit students who participate
7 in such courses from being counted as absent from school; to provide for a definition; to
8 provide for a short title; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to
9 repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

10 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

11 **SECTION 1.**

12 This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "Georgia Released Time Education Act."

SECTION 2.

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Subpart 2 of Part 1 of Article 16 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to compulsory attendance, is amended by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-692.4.

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

(1) 'Local education agency' shall have the same meaning as in Code Section 20-2-167.1.

(2) 'Released time course' means a course in religious moral instruction provided by a person or organization independently of a public school.

(b) By August 1, 2024, each local education agency shall adopt a policy that excuses students from school to attend a released time course for at least one hour per school week.

Such policy shall require that:

(1) The student's parent or legal guardian gives written consent for the student to attend the released time course;

(2) The person or organization sponsoring the released time course maintains attendance records and makes them available to the officials of the school in which the student is enrolled;

(3)(A) Transportation to and from the location of the released time course, including transportation for students with disabilities, is the responsibility of the student or his or her parent or legal guardian; and

(B) If the person or organization sponsoring the released time course is to provide student transportation from school, appropriate consent shall be provided by the student or his or her parent or legal guardian;

(4) The person or organization sponsoring the released time course verifies to the local education agency that such person or organization assumes full responsibility for the student at all times such student is participating in a released time course activity.

39 including, but not limited to, transportation provided by such person or organization to
40 and from such activity;

41 (5) No local education agency funds except de minimis administrative costs are
42 expended in providing or accommodating the released time course;

43 (6) Released time courses are not to be held on public school property unless permitted
44 under a neutral policy of equal access opening such school property for use by
45 community groups; and

46 (7) The student assumes responsibility for any missed school work.

47 (c) Each local education agency may adopt a policy that awards academic credit for the
48 completion of a released time course. In determining the academic credit to award for
49 completion of such course, the local education agency shall evaluate the course based on
50 purely secular criteria that are substantially the same criteria used to evaluate similar
51 courses for purposes of determining the academic credit to award for such courses. The
52 decision to award academic credit for a released time course shall be neutral to, and shall
53 not involve any test for, religious content or denominational affiliation. Such secular
54 criteria shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following:

55 (1) The number of hours of classroom instruction time;

56 (2) A review of the released time course syllabus that reflects released time course
57 requirements and materials used;

58 (3) The methods of assessment used in the released time course; and

59 (4) The qualifications of the released time course instructor, which shall be similar to the
60 qualifications of teachers employed by the local education agency.

61 (d) While in attendance in a released time course, a student shall not be considered absent
62 from school."

63 **SECTION 2.**

64 This Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law
65 without such approval.

66 **SECTION 3.**

67 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.