



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ALABAMA STATE HOUSE

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St. Clair and Etowah Counties

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HOUSE APPROVES REP. MACK BUTLER'S BILL TO PROTECT STUDENT RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Montgomery – The House of Representatives on Wednesday awarded its approval to the “Student Religious Liberties Act,” a measure sponsored by State Rep. Mack Butler (R – Rainbow City) and designed to ensure that students retain their constitutional rights to prayer and religious expressions while in public schools.

The bill is part of the House Republican Caucus’s “Alabama First” legislative agenda.

“A series of federal court decisions over the last 50 years has continued to whittle away the rights to prayer and religious expression in schools,” Butler said. “These decisions have created more confusion than clarity in terms of what is permissible and what is not in our public schools, but my legislation remedies this problem by securing and protecting the right to student-led prayer and religious expressions while on campus grounds.”

Butler, who previously served on the Etowah County School Board, noted that in 2000, then-Attorney General Bill Pryor released a memorandum which outlined guidelines for religious expression in schools and contained a list of generally permissible activities within schools and school-related events that had been court-tested.

But because of the threat of lawsuits from anti-religious and atheist groups, Butler said, many school systems chose to halt religious expressions of any kind from taking place.

The Student Religious Liberty Act, which was filed as House Bill 1 this session, is simple, and precise. It requires school systems to adopt and implement a policy regarding voluntary student expression of religious viewpoints.

“I’ve spoken to several teachers who are scared of making any mention of religion in class, but this bill will force school systems to clarify what is and is not permissible so that we can eliminate that fear among our educators,” Butler said. “The U.S. Supreme Court has made clear that student-led religious activities are permitted in our schools, so the Student Religious Liberties Act will simply ensure that students across Alabama are able to express their religious beliefs as allowed by the U.S. Constitution.”

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