

House Bill 1663

By: Representative Mangham of the 94<sup>th</sup>

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia  
2 Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary  
3 students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," so as to provide for the offering of state  
4 funded high school courses in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the  
5 History and Literature of the New Testament Era; to provide for the adoption of the curricula  
6 for such courses by the State Board of Education; to provide for the topics of instruction,  
7 reading materials, and methods of teaching in such courses; to provide for certain matters  
8 relating to the employment and assignment of teachers of such courses; to provide for the  
9 granting of academic credit for the successful completion of such courses; to provide for the  
10 monitoring of the content and teaching of such courses; to provide for related matters; to  
11 provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

12 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:**

13 **SECTION 1.**

14 Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
15 relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under  
16 the "Quality Basic Education Act," is amended by adding at the end thereof a new Code  
17 section to read as follows:

18 "20-2-148.

19 (a)(1) In implementing this Code section, it is the intent of the General Assembly to  
20 accomplish the following objectives:

21 (A) To equip the student with a fundamental understanding of important literary forms  
22 contained in the Bible as well as people and symbols often referred to in literature, art,  
23 and music;

24 (B) To equip the student with a fundamental understanding of important biblical  
25 contributions to history, law, American community life, and culture;

1 (C) To give insight into the world views of America's founding fathers and to  
2 understand the biblical influences on their views of human rights;

3 (D) To provide a greater knowledge of Middle Eastern history, geography, religion,  
4 and politics; and

5 (E) To inform the students of the importance of religion in world and national history,  
6 without imposing the doctrine of any particular religious sect.

7 (2) In implementing the course provided for in this Code section, it is the intent of the  
8 General Assembly that the following terms and guidelines shall apply:

9 (A) 'Secular purpose' is defined as those studies which instill in students values such  
10 as independent thought, tolerance of diverse views, self-respect, maturity, self-reliance,  
11 and logical decision making, and those studies which give students great insight and  
12 appreciation of literature, the arts, politics, history, law, social studies, and current  
13 events. Secular purpose, for example, should not mean 'nonreligious purpose' but  
14 'general public purpose';

15 (B) The studies shall be structured and presented in such a manner that the presentation  
16 of material neither enhances nor inhibits religion. Inculcation or proselytization of any  
17 particular doctrine, dogma, religious belief, or theory is prohibited;

18 (C) There shall be no requirement that a teacher shall have a particular religious belief  
19 (or nonreligious belief) or persuasion in order to conduct religious studies;

20 (D) Funds for the presentation of instruction shall be provided by the school board. If  
21 school board funding is not available, then the funds may be raised by the private  
22 sector;

23 (E) The teaching about religion in public schools and the presentation or offering of  
24 an elective course in Bible study, comparative religion, or both in the secondary schools  
25 is expressly permitted and is constitutional;

26 (F) Study of the Bible should stress the influence of the Bible on history, culture, the  
27 arts, and contemporary issues;

28 (G) Study of the Bible should permit and encourage a comprehensive and balanced  
29 examination of the entire spectrum of ideas and attitudes pertaining to it as a component  
30 of human culture;

31 (H) Study of the Bible should examine the religious dimension of human experience  
32 in its broader cultural context, including its relation to economic, political, and social  
33 institutions as well as its relation to the arts, language, and culture;

34 (I) Study of the Bible should be objective and nonsectarian;

35 (J) Study of the Bible should be academic in nature, stressing student awareness and  
36 understanding, not acceptance and conformity;

1 (K) Study should be descriptive and nonconfessional and should be conducted in an  
2 environment free of advocacy;

3 (L) Study should seek to develop and utilize the various skills, attitudes, and abilities  
4 that are essential to history and the social sciences, that is, locating, classifying, and  
5 interpreting data; keen observation; critical reading, listening, and thinking;  
6 questioning; and effective communication;

7 (M) Study of the Bible should be academically responsible and pedagogically sound,  
8 utilizing accepted methods and materials of the social sciences, history, and literature;  
9 and

10 (N) Study about the Bible should center on the biblical text itself rather than extraneous  
11 material and theories which might express a particular theological position rather than  
12 the historical presentation found in the Bible.

13 (b) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students  
14 in grades nine through 12 an elective course in the History and Literature of the Old  
15 Testament Era and an elective course in the History and Literature of the New Testament  
16 Era. The purpose of such courses shall be to accommodate the rights and desires of those  
17 teachers and students who wish to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to  
18 familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded  
19 by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New  
20 Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and  
21 New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history,  
22 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

23 (c)(1) No later than February 1, 2007, the State Board of Education shall adopt a  
24 curriculum for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans,  
25 which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection.

26 (2) The topics to be included in the course in the History and Literature of the Old  
27 Testament Era may include the historical background and events of the period; the history  
28 of the Kingdom of Israel; the poetry of the Old Testament; the influence of Old  
29 Testament history and literature on subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events,  
30 including recent and current events in the Middle East. The topics to be included in the  
31 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era may include the historical  
32 background and events of the period; the life of Jesus of Nazareth; the parables of Jesus;  
33 the life and travels of Paul; and the influence of New Testament history and literature on  
34 subsequent art, music, literature, law, and events.

35 (3) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the  
36 basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the  
37 book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic

1 text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition,  
2 students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including  
3 selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious  
4 and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and  
5 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses  
6 shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old  
7 and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the  
8 languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the  
9 historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments  
10 into the English language. The local board of education may determine which version  
11 of the Old or New Testament shall be used as the main text or, if the local board of  
12 education does not do so, that determination may be made by the teacher of the course.  
13 No student shall be required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New  
14 Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the Old or  
15 New Testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she  
16 shall be permitted to do so.

17 (4) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

18 (A) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to  
19 indoctrinate the students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or as to  
20 the correct interpretation thereof;

21 (B) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible;  
22 and

23 (C) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

24 (d) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of  
25 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and  
26 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section.  
27 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on  
28 any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation  
29 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.  
30 Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be  
31 determined by the local boards of education.

32 (e) On and after July 1, 2007, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum credits  
33 at the high school level, satisfactory completion of the course in the History and Literature  
34 of the Old Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half  
35 unit of elective credit, and satisfactory completion of the course in the History and  
36 Literature of the New Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for

1 one-half unit of elective credit; provided, however, that such courses are taught in strict  
2 compliance with the requirements of this Code section.

3 (f) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content and  
4 teaching of the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the  
5 course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era as it deems appropriate.

6 (g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board  
7 of education to offer courses regarding the Old Testament or the New Testament that are  
8 not in compliance with this Code section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed  
9 pursuant to this article shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not  
10 meet the requirements of this Code section.

11 (h) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education  
12 from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In  
13 determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors  
14 including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact  
15 such books have had upon history and culture."

16 **SECTION 2.**

17 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2006.

18 **SECTION 3.**

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