

Dear chair and committee members;

Bill 2023 H5688 is a barely veiled attack on teachers and fact based learning. It's an obvious attempt at creating a loophole for religions to be as intrusive as it wants in regards to a child's education. This bill is purposely creating a spot in learning for ideas that don't correspond or are in direct conflict with facts and reality. There's a lot of troubling parts of this bill that should raise alarms with any sensible person. But representing Rhode Island Atheists I'm going over the religious implications.

As parents we're responsible for the way our children learn to navigate our complicated world. Every good parent wants their children to grow up to be honest and productive adults. Capable of also carrying on our family values and traditions. Whether they're cultural or religious, those are the most personal

parts of us. And we want to leave them for the next generation.

Those stories, traditions and values that specific families subscribe to is taught at home. Not at a public school. Religious dogma cannot be allowed to dictate academics. They're separate for good reasons. When superstitious beliefs aren't allowed to be challenged. We end up having witch trials, inquisitions and religious oppression championed by the religion with the most power. Not with the most truth.

The country we live in today came out of the realization that progress isn't possible when faith is the motivation.

This bill would also allow a racist parent to stop their child from learning anything that contradicts their beliefs. No matter how wrong or disgusting they may be. It would allow ignorance to go unchallenged

and stop the open exchange of ideas. It's a religious abuse of our system. To use the public schools to help make their job of indoctrination easier. And that can't be allowed. Children also have a right to the best fact-based learning experience we can provide for them. That's how we prepare them for adulthood. But if your main concern is the fear that your children may learn how to think critically you're already violating their rights as individuals. It's denying them the information they deserve to make their own decisions on how and what they believe.

Public education is there to teach. It shouldn't also be burdened with the responsibility of validating a parents personal beliefs. And this bill plans on doing it dishonestly by forcing a teacher to withhold important information under penalty of law.

We need to teach our children how the world works with science and facts. Not ignorance and magic. Rather than teaching a child why the stove is hot. This bill wants the option of teaching a child to instead pray to remove the stove demon. And I don't believe for a minute that's not the logical conclusion. Because that's all this is, "another bill trying to undermine the wall between religion and government." This is nothing more than pandering to the trend of embracing ignorance, latching onto the newest cultural war issues, conspiratorial thinking and misinformation. If a parent chooses to lie to their child at home to save their soul. That has to be their responsibility alone. Public education shouldn't be helping any religion with indoctrination.

Teachers are there to teach the best way they know how. This bill will tie their hands

from letting them do their jobs. And even make it a crime to teach facts. We already have religious schools. Public schools need to remain secular and inclusive institutions of learning.

The policies proposed in this bill feeds into the problem. And lends credit to the idea that even facts and neutral ideas aren't safe from manipulation. The supernatural claims religions make and reality shouldn't even hint to be on equal footing. Because they are not.

I know firsthand the problems religion has with reality. Because I was raised a fundamental Christian. I was taught geology, history and other science when I was in school. But at home I was told that Jesus was coming back any day now. And Jehovah was going to make a paradise on earth. Finally defeating Satan once and for all. Lions would no longer have to kill to

eat. Dogs and cats would get along. And people would return to the perfect state God intended for them. I held that belief most of my childhood. And my mother being a biblical literalist never planned for her children's adult life. Because again, she believed that Jesus was coming back any day now. And I'm not stating that there's anything wrong with holding that belief. But there's a place for that belief to be nurtured and it's not a public school. What would my life look like now if my mother was able to force teachers into withholding any facts that challenged her beliefs?

Because let's be clear "they are just beliefs." They're not rooted in any kind of fact. And when a belief has to dismiss or discredit demonstrable facts. It's usually because it's wrong.

Thank you for your time

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Atheists