COMMITTEE REPORT

March 25, 2010

**S. 134**

Introduced by Senators Sheheen, Verdin, Fair and Campsen

S. Printed 3/25/10--S.

Read the first time January 13, 2009.

**THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

To whom was referred a Bill (S. 134) to amend the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, by adding Section 59‑1‑435 so as to enact the “Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act,” which prohibits, etc., respectfully

**REPORT:**

That they have duly and carefully considered the same and recommend that the same do pass:

JOHN E. COURSON for Committee.

**STATEMENT OF ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT**

ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT ON GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES:

$0 (No additional expenditures or savings are expected)

ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT ON FEDERAL & OTHER FUND EXPENDITURES:

$0 (No additional expenditures or savings are expected)

**EXPLANATION OF IMPACT:**

The State Department of Education estimates this bill will have no fiscal impact on the General Fund of the State or on federal and/or other funds.

*Approved By:*

Harry Bell

Office of State Budget

**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 59‑1‑435 SO AS TO ENACT THE “RELIGIOUS VIEWPOINTS ANTIDISCRIMINATION ACT,” WHICH PROHIBITS A SCHOOL DISTRICT FROM DISCRIMINATING AGAINST A STUDENT BASED ON RELIGIOUS VIEWPOINT, ALLOWS A STUDENT TO EXPRESS HIS RELIGIOUS VIEWPOINT, ALLOWS A STUDENT TO EXPRESS HIS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN HOMEWORK AND CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS, AND ALLOWS STUDENTS TO ORGANIZE AND PARTICIPATE IN RELIGIOUS STUDENT GATHERINGS TO THE SAME EXTENT AS SECULAR NONCURRICULAR GROUPS.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Article 5, Chapter 1, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 59‑1‑435. (A) This section may be cited as the ‘Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act’.

(B) As used in this section, ‘discriminate’ means to make a distinction in favor of or against a person on the basis of the group, class, or category to which the person belongs, rather than according to actual merit.

(C) A school district shall treat a student’s voluntary expression of a religious viewpoint, if any, on an otherwise permissible subject in the same manner the district treats a student’s voluntary expression of a secular or other viewpoint on an otherwise permissible subject and must not discriminate against the student based on a religious viewpoint expressed by the student on an otherwise permissible subject.

(D) A student may express his beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of his submission. Homework and classroom assignments must be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school district. A student may not be penalized or rewarded based on the religious content of his work.

(E) Students may organize prayer groups, religious clubs, ‘see you at the pole’ gatherings, or other religious gatherings before, during, and after school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other noncurricular student activities and groups. Religious groups must be given the same access to school facilities for assembling as is given to other noncurricular groups without discrimination based on the religious content of the students’ expression. If student groups that meet for nonreligious activities are permitted to advertise or announce meetings of the groups, the school district must not discriminate against groups that meet for prayer or other religious speech. A school district may disclaim school sponsorship of noncurricular groups and events in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to engage in prayer or religious speech.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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