

HB 136 -- STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

SPONSOR: Hudson

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Higher Education by a vote of 7 to 2.

This bill defines "adverse action", "belief-based student association", and "benefit" and prohibits public institutions of higher learning from taking any action or enforcing any policy that denies a belief-based student association benefits available to other student associations. The bill also prohibits discrimination against a belief-based student association based on its requirement that leaders of the association adhere to its sincerely held beliefs, sincere practice requirements, or standards of conduct.

The bill also authorizes aggrieved belief-based student associations to seek appropriate relief in a judicial or administrative proceeding against a public institution of higher learning that violates the requirements of the bill.

This bill is similar to HB 1724 (2022).

PROponents: Supporters say that this bill provides clarity to universities in the state on what protections belief-based associations have on campus. The bill is similar to language adopted in 17 other states and will provide a clear standard for associations to point to while preventing potential litigation. This language allows student groups to prevent a "hostile takeover" of the leadership of the group by members that do not hold the same tenants of belief.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Hudson; Missouri Catholic Conference; 1st Amendment Partnership; Curtis Lee Cole, Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, USA; William Payne; Americans For Prosperity; Foundation For Individual Rights and Expression; P. Logan Spena, Alliance Defending Freedom; and Timothy Faber, Missouri Baptist Convention.

OPponents: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill is discriminatory in its nature, and that certain religious tenants are inflammatory. Public dollars should not be spent to promote or authorize discrimination and this bill will allow clubs to exist on campus with leadership that espouses these views. Student groups have the opportunity to elect their leadership and should be allowed to choose whichever leaders they want without such restrictions.

Testifying in person against the bill were Pro Choice Missouri; Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Rachel Schock; Missouri NEA; Joseph Kane; Cyan George; Logan Carter; Garrett Lierman; Brian Kaylor, Word & Way; Churchnet; Jamie Howard; Michelle Scott-Huffman; Aubrey Brewster; and Michael Walk.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.