

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

HB 371

2025 Regular Session

Amedee

June 11, 2025

To the Honorable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives and the Honorable President and Members of the Senate.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We, the conferees appointed to confer over the disagreement between the two houses concerning House Bill No. 371 by Representative Amedee, recommend the following concerning the Reengrossed bill:

1. That Senate Committee Amendments Nos. 1 through 5 and 9 through 14 by the Committee on Education (#2907) be rejected.
2. That Senate Committee Amendments Nos. 6 through 8 by the Committee on Education (#2907) be adopted.
3. That the set of Senate Floor Amendments proposed by Senator Edmonds (#3032) be rejected.
4. That the following amendments to the Reengrossed bill be adopted:

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, line 4, after "5233.1 and" and before " the comma "," delete "R.S. 17:236.1(H) and 407.33(9) and (10)" and insert "R.S. 17:407.33(9)"

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 1, line 7, after "date;" delete the remainder of the line, and at the beginning of line 8, delete "cooperatives;"

AMENDMENT NO. 3

On page 2, line 25, at the end of the line, insert "or a nonpublic school not seeking state approval"

AMENDMENT NO. 4

On page 2, delete lines 28 and 29 in their entirety

AMENDMENT NO. 5

On page 3, at the beginning of line 1, change "(c)" to "(b)"

AMENDMENT NO. 6

On page 3, at the beginning of line 2, change "(d)" to "(c)"

AMENDMENT NO. 7

On page 5, line 4, after "reenacted" delete the remainder of the line

AMENDMENT NO. 8

On page 5, line 5, after "and" and before "hereby" delete " 407.33(9) and (10) are" and insert "R.S. 17:407.33(9) is"

AMENDMENT NO. 9

On page 5, delete lines 6 through 21 in their entirety

AMENDMENT NO. 10

On page 6, delete lines 5 through 7 in their entirety

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Beryl A. Amedée

Senator Rick Edmonds

Representative Nicholas Muscarello, Jr.

Senator Valarie Hodges

Representative Raymond J. Crews

Senator Beth Mizell

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT DIGEST

HB 371

2025 Regular Session

Amedee

Keyword and oneliner of the instrument as it left the House

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS: Provides relative to the free exercise of religion

Report adopts Senate amendments to:

1. Provide that a person whose religions exercise has been burdened may assert that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial, administrative, or other proceeding to obtain relief.

Report rejects Senate amendments which would have:

1. Provided that if a place of worship has met the requirements for zoning, building code, and fire and safety regulation, the government shall not restrict or deny the use of the building for a meeting of two or more parents whose child attends a virtual public school.
2. Provided that each city, parish, or other local public school board may adopt a policy to make available opportunities for after-school religious instruction programs and may adopt a policy to provide for released time for students enrolled in the schools under its jurisdiction.
3. Provided for the Home Study Cooperatives Protection Act to ensure the following:
 - (1) Parents who choose to associate to advance the primary education of their children shall not be subject to any additional restrictions other than the minimum requirements provided for in R.S. 17:221.
 - (2) Ensure that a church that allows a home study cooperative to use its facilities retains all religious free exercise rights whether or not the operation of a home study cooperative is directed by parents who are member of the church or nonmembers who live in the community.
5. Provided that two or more parents whose children are participating in a home study program may form a home study education cooperative for the purpose of completing courses typically studied in preparation for college admission.
4. Defined "approved home study program", "home study cooperative", "a nonpublic school not seeking state approval", "operation of a home study cooperative", "parent", "primary education", and "state board".
5. Provided that each home study cooperative shall remain subject to laws or other legal provisions relating to the protection of the physical health and safety of its students and the prevention of unlawful conduct. Otherwise, each cooperative shall be exempt from provisions imposed by the state, local government, or local school systems including the following:
 - (1) No state, local or other school system employee or other government employee shall initiate any investigation that would not have been initiated but for the presence of a home study cooperative.

(2) No public school governing authority shall take any action or discriminate against any student or parents based on their participation in a home study cooperative.

(3) No public school governing authority shall require that any home study cooperative be in any manner required to register or otherwise report its existence or anything related to the operation of a home study cooperative.

(4) Home study cooperatives may partner with local education agencies to voluntarily access extracurricular programming and interscholastic athletics, or dual enrollment opportunities.

6. Provided that if requested, the La Department of Education shall provide information and guidance to home study students or home study cooperatives for all of the following:

(1) Recommendations for curriculum and instructional materials that align with the Louisiana Student Standard in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

(2) Where to locate statewide assessments.

(3) Eligibility guidance for participation in the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) and the Jump Start career pathway programs.

7. Defined "parent", "partnering church", "parent-church-public virtual school partnership", "public virtual school", and "virtual learners".

8. Provided that two or more parents whose children are participating in a public virtual school program may meet in a parent's home, church, or other place of worship, or a nonprofit community center.

9. Provided that the public virtual student shall be included in the membership count for the city, parish, or other local public school system that operates the public virtual school in which the student is enrolled for all purposes.

10. Provided that no state agency, city, parish, or local public school board shall adopt a policy prohibiting the parent of a child enrolled in a public virtual school from partnering with a church or other person selected by the parent for any of the following purposes:

(1) Providing religious education or Bible study.

(2) Facilitating socialization for student enrichment.

(3) Supervising the student for the parent while the student is receiving virtual instruction or engaging in virtual learning.

11. Provided that each partnering church shall remain subject to laws or other legal provisions required for a church relating to the protection of the physical health and safety of children shall be exempt from statutes, rules, regulations, guidelines, or other regulatory provisions imposed by the state, local governments, or local school systems, including the following:

(1) No city, parish, or other local public school board employee or other government employee shall initiate or conduct any site inspection, site visit, or other investigation that would not have been initiated or made but for the operation or presence of virtual learners, pursuant to a parent-church-public virtual school partnership.

(2) No city, parish, or other local public school board shall take any action or in any manner discriminate against or otherwise distinguish any student who is a virtual learner or a parent based on participation in a parent-church-public virtual school partnership.

(3) No city, parish, or other local public school board or the state board shall require that any home study cooperative be in any manner required to register or otherwise report its existence or anything related to the operation of a parent-church-public virtual school partnership.

Report amends the bill to:

1. Provide that if a church or other place of worship has met the requirements for zoning, building code, and fire safety regulation, and has received an occupancy license, the government shall not restrict or deny the use of the building for a meeting of two or more parents or children participating in a nonpublic school not seeking state approval.
2. Remove the provision that the government shall not deny the use of the building for the completion of courses required for a Taylor Opportunity Program for Students.
3. Make technical changes.
4. Remove the language that provides the purposes for which two or more parents with children participating in an approved home study program may form a home study education cooperative.
5. Remove the definition of "home study education cooperative".

Digest of the bill as proposed by the Conference Committee

Proposed law provides that the government shall provide protections of the highest order to every place of worship.

Proposed law provides that the government shall not discriminate against a place of worship by requiring restrictions that are greater than the least severe restrictions that are imposed upon or enforced against any secular business, service, or assembly.

Proposed law provides that in 2023, the legislature adopted Article XII, Section 17 of the Constitution of La.

Proposed law (R.S. 13:5233.1) provides that if a church or other place of worship has met the requirements for zoning, building code, and fire safety regulation, and has received an occupancy license, the government shall not restrict or deny the use of the building in any of the following manners:

- (1) Based upon the day of the week the building is being used.
- (2) Based upon the content or types of religious instruction, education, or activities conducted in the building.
- (3) For a mother's day out program.
- (4) For a meeting of two or more parents or children participating in a home study program.
- (5) For a Vacation Bible School or Bible Camp.

Proposed law provides that nothing in proposed law shall prevent enforcement of Title 14 of the La. Revised Statutes of 1950 or any other applicable provisions of criminal law.

Proposed law expands the definition of "compelling state interest" and "exercise of religion".

Present law provides that a violation of the preservation of religious freedom act is asserted as a claim or defense in judicial proceeding.

Proposed law provides that a person whose religious exercise has been burdened may assert that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial, administrative, or other proceeding to obtain relief.

Proposed law expands the remedies to include court approved expert witness fees.

Proposed law provides that a person shall bring an action to assert a claim for damages not later than one year after the date that an action was dismissed by an administrative law judge or a court, or there was a finding in favor of the person on the merit which resulted in a claim authorized pursuant to the Preservation of Religious Freedom Act.

Proposed law provides that an action can be asserted no later than one year from the 75th day after the date on which the notice is mailed pursuant to R.S. 13:5238.

Proposed law defines "mother's day out program".

Proposed law expands the definition of "camp" to include a Vacation Bible School or Bible Camp.

Effective upon signature of governor or lapse of time for gubernatorial action.

(Amends R.S. 13:5232(1), 5233, 5234 (3), (5), and (6)(intro. para.), 5237, 5239, and 5240(A) and (B) and R.S. 17:407.33(1); Adds R.S. 13:5232(7) and 5233.1 and R.S. and 407.33(9))