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STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 54th Legislature (2013)

HOUSE BILL 1674 By: Blackwell and Kern of the

HOUSE BILL 1674

By: Blackwell and Kern of the House

and

Brecheen of the Senate

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to schools; creating the Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act; providing short title; stating legislative findings; directing State Board of Education, district boards of education, and certain administrators to create certain environment within schools; permitting teachers to help students understand certain information about scientific theories; disallowing State Board of Education, district boards of education, and certain administrators from prohibiting teachers from helping students understand certain information about scientific theories; providing for evaluation of students based on understanding of course materials; prohibiting penalizing of students for holding certain position on scientific theories; prohibiting certain construction; stating intent; directing State Department of Education to provide certain notification; directing superintendents to disseminate certain information; providing for codification; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

1 SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified
2 in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 11-121 of Title 70, unless there
3 is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

4 This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Scientific
5 Education and Academic Freedom Act".

6 SECTION 2. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified
7 in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 11-122 of Title 70, unless there
8 is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

9 A. The Oklahoma Legislature finds that an important purpose of
10 science education is to inform students about scientific evidence
11 and to help students develop critical thinking skills they need in
12 order to become intelligent, productive, and scientifically informed
13 citizens. The Legislature further finds that the teaching of some
14 scientific concepts including but not limited to premises in the
15 areas of biology, chemistry, meteorology, bioethics and physics can
16 cause controversy, and that some teachers may be unsure of the
17 expectations concerning how they should present information on some
18 subjects such as, but not limited to, biological evolution, the
19 chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning.

20 B. The State Board of Education, district boards of education,
21 district superintendents and administrators, and public school
22 principals and administrators shall endeavor to create an
23 environment within public elementary and secondary schools that
24 encourages students to explore scientific questions, learn about

1 scientific evidence, develop critical thinking skills, and respond
2 appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about
3 controversial issues. Educational authorities in this state shall
4 also endeavor to assist teachers to find more effective ways to
5 present the science curriculum where it addresses scientific
6 controversies. Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help
7 students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective
8 manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of
9 existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught.

10 C. The State Board of Education, a district board of education,
11 district superintendent or administrator, or public school principal
12 or administrator shall not prohibit any teacher in a school district
13 in this state from helping students understand, analyze, critique,
14 and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and
15 scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to
16 the course being taught.

17 D. Students may be evaluated based upon their understanding of
18 course materials, but no student in any public school or institution
19 shall be penalized in any way because the student may subscribe to a
20 particular position on scientific theories. Nothing in this
21 subsection shall be construed to exempt students from learning,
22 understanding and being tested on curriculum as prescribed by state
23 and local education standards.

1 E. The provisions of the Scientific Education and Academic
2 Freedom Act shall only protect the teaching of scientific
3 information, and shall not be construed to promote any religious or
4 nonreligious doctrine, promote discrimination for or against a
5 particular set of religious beliefs or nonbeliefs, or promote
6 discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion. The intent
7 of the provisions of this act is to create an environment in which
8 both the teacher and students can openly and objectively discuss the
9 facts and observations of science, and the assumptions that underlie
10 their interpretation.

11 F. By no later than the start of the 2013-2014 school year, the
12 State Department of Education shall notify all district
13 superintendents of the provisions of the Scientific Education and
14 Academic Freedom Act. Each superintendent shall then disseminate to
15 all employees within the district a copy of the provisions of this
16 act.

17 SECTION 3. This act shall become effective July 1, 2013.

18 SECTION 4. It being immediately necessary for the preservation
19 of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby
20 declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and
21 be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

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23 COMMITTEE REPORT BY: COMMITTEE ON COMMON EDUCATION, dated 02/19/2013
24 - DO PASS, As Coauthored.