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Will a Massachusetts bill entitled "An Act Relative to Protecting the Religious Freedom of Students" encourage the discussion of creationism in public school science classes? That's what a cosponsor of the bill, Representative Elizabeth Poirier (R-14th Bristol), [told](#) [4] the *Cape Cod Times* (October 7, 2009). The bill, House No. 376, received a hearing on October 6, 2009, at which, according to the *Times*, "No one testified against the bill, which has bipartisan support and is expected to pass favorably through the Joint Committee on Education."

Evolution is in fact not mentioned in the bill, which would [require](#) [5] school districts in the state to "adopt and implement a local policy that allows for a limited public forum and voluntary student expression of religious views at school events, graduation ceremonies, and in class assignments, and non-curricular school groups and activities. ... Districts shall treat such expression ... in the same manner as the expression of a secular view. Districts are prohibited from discriminating against any student on the basis of a student's expressed religious views."

In commenting on a similar bill in Virginia (HB 1135 in 2008), Americans United's Dena Sher [urged](#) [6] legislators to amend the bill to ensure that classwork is still "graded according to academic standards of substance and relevance," observing that otherwise "this statute could be understood to force biology teachers to give equal credit to students who, when asked questions about evolution, answer with religious views about creation." The version of the bill that was eventually passed and enacted in Virginia was amended along the lines that Sher suggested.

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