

Missouri House Committee Considers Blaine Amendment Repeal

A provision placed in the Missouri Constitution more than 100 years ago got a lot of attention from the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee of the Missouri House on Wednesday.

The legislation ([HJR 10](#)), sponsored by Rep. Jay Barnes (R-Jefferson City), would repeal a constitutional provision known as the Blaine Amendment, which prohibits state funds from being used to support religious schools.

The bill would instead allow parents the right to choose any accredited school for their child using a stipend equivalent to what local and state governments would pay for the child to attend public school.

"This amendment would end what I believe to be the misguided practice of attaching public education funds to buildings and instead would attach them to children," Rep. Barnes said.

Mike Hoey, executive director of the Missouri Catholic Conference, spoke in support of the bill and urged the committee to rethink the way they view public education.

"The bottom line is we ought to start thinking about children in a more general way, education in a more broad way and not just about public schools."

Hoey also gave examples of countries in Europe that take a broad view of public education and allow public funds to be used for the cost of attendance at private and religious schools.

Michael Podgursky, a professor of economics at the University of Missouri-Columbia, explained the origin of the Blaine Amendment to help the committee to see the need for a repeal.

"The Blaine Amendment has a sordid history and really has very little to do with separation of church and state as we understand the notion today, but was really grounded in anti-Catholic bigotry and xenophobia against immigrants," Podgursky said.

Podgursky asked the committee to imagine what it would be like if the Blaine Amendment restrictions were extended to hospitals, such as Barnes-Jewish Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital, and said the Blaine Amendment acts like "handcuffs" in the area of K-12 education.

"The Blaine Amendment has warped the way we do public policy in the area of K-12 education. In other areas of public policy, including other parts of education, faith-based organizations are routinely funded by government to provide services to the general public and serve the public interest," Podgursky said.

Podgursky argued that the Blaine Amendment serves no useful purpose, and he listed

numerous studies that document the high quality of education provided by Catholic schools. He said Catholic schools are especially effective in educating the urban poor and minorities.

"It (The Blaine Amendment) imposes serious restrictions on the remedies that can be provided to poor children in under-performing school districts. Social science research finds that Catholic schools do an excellent job of educating children. Moreover, they do so in a cost-effective way," Podgursky said.

Podgursky said the Blaine Amendment prevents the state of Missouri from enlisting Catholic and other religious schools in the effort to turn around the poor education received by many of Missouri's poor urban school children.

Podgursky testified as an individual and not on behalf of the university.