

## **An Open Letter from Texas Clergy on Religious Freedom and Public Education**

To the members of the Texas State Board of Education,

As clergy serving congregations and organizations across Texas, and who hold religious texts with the utmost reverence, we write with deep concern about the proposed TEA reading list and social studies curriculum changes before the State Board of Education.

The proposed TEA reading list is incompatible with the vibrant, multicultural, and multifaith communities that attend Texas' public schools. It includes Bible stories for very young students – using only a Protestant Christian translation (except for one outdated Jewish translation). Kindergartners will be assigned New Testament passages. First graders will be assigned the Parable of the Prodigal Son. And students who practice different faith traditions, or no faith at all, will be left out, their beliefs unrepresented.

Even more concerning, the author of several biblical texts is listed as "The State of Texas." The State of Texas did not write the Bible and has no business putting its name on it.

Texas's public schools are where children from all backgrounds sit side by side — Baptist students, Muslim students, Jewish students, children from secular homes — and learn together from texts that privilege no one religion, but rather, the pursuit of knowledge. That is religious freedom in its most honest form.

The SBOE process itself has been rife with irregularities. A small group of political appointees — “content advisors” — was given disproportionate influence. Certain faith communities were blatantly excluded. 130 teachers were given just two and a half days to review materials they could not meaningfully change. And the process failed to meet Texas law requiring meaningful participation from educators and parents.

Sacred texts belong to the faith communities that cherish them, and public schools serve ALL families — of all faiths and practices. When the government inserts itself into that sacred responsibility, both faith and freedom are put at risk. The state does religion no favor by becoming its sponsor.

For these reasons, we urge the State Board of Education to reject the proposed curriculum changes and TEA reading list in their current form. Instead, we ask that you take the time and seek the community input necessary to ensure the curriculum and reading list reflect the fullness of Texas communities, religions, and cultures. We ask that you protect religious freedom by respecting all Texas families — and the right of every student to learn and every family to choose what is taught in matters of faith. Let sacred texts be taught in homes and houses of worship — not mandated by the state in public school classrooms.

Respectfully,

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