

## SB4 INTRODUCED



1 SB4  
2 EJ5M4C9-1  
3 By Senator Shelnuttt  
4 RFD: Education Policy  
5 First Read: 13-Jan-26  
6 PFD: 22-May-25

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5 SYNOPSIS:

6 Under existing law, the State Board of Education  
7 has a policy providing elective credit to students who  
8 attend religious instruction during the school day, and  
9 each local board of education may choose whether to  
10 implement the policy.

11 This bill would require each local board of  
12 education to implement a policy allowing elective  
13 credit to students who are released from the classroom  
14 to attend religious instruction during the school day,  
15 provided each local board of education may tailor the  
16 policy to meet their needs.

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19 A BILL  
20 TO BE ENTITLED  
21 AN ACT  
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23 Relating to public K-12 education; to amend Section  
24 16-1-20.6, Code of Alabama 1975; to further provide for the  
25 provision of elective credit for students who attend religious  
26 instruction during the school day.

27 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

28 Section 1. Section 16-1-20.6, Code of Alabama 1975, is



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amended to read as follows:

"§16-1-20.6

(a) This section shall be known and may be cited as the Alabama Released Time Credit Act.

(b) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) That the United States Supreme Court, in its decision in *Zorach v. Claiborn*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952), upheld the constitutionality of released time programs for religious instruction for public school students during the school day.

(2) That the United States Constitution and state law allows local school districts to offer religious released time education for the benefit of public school students.

(3) That the purpose of this section is to incorporate a constitutionally acceptable method of allowing school districts to offer released time classes and, in grades where credit is earned, to award students elective credit for classes taken during the school day in released time programs.

(c) As used in this section, the term released time means a period of time during the school day when a student is allowed to participate in an elective course in religious instruction, conducted off school district property, by a private entity.

(d) The State Board of Education shall adopt and each local board of education ~~may~~ shall implement a policy ~~for~~ allowing a student to attend released time as an elective course if all of the following are satisfied:

(1) The parent or guardian of the student gives written



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consent.

(2) The sponsoring entity maintains attendance records and makes them available to the public school the student attends.

(3) The sponsoring entity makes provisions for and assumes liability for the student who is excused for released time.

(4) No public funds are expended other than de minimis administrative costs.

(5) No public school personnel are involved in providing the religious instruction.

(e) In grades where credit is earned, a student who participates in released time may earn elective course credit for participation, as provided by rules adopted by the State Board of Education for elective courses. Credit awarded may not exceed normal credit given for an elective course in the particular school system. The State Board of Education shall also adopt minimum standards for class attendance necessary to qualify for credit.

(f) A student who participates in religious instruction for elective credit during released time shall be credited with time spent as if the student attended school, and the time shall be calculated as part of the actual school day.

(g) Transportation to and from the place of released time, including transportation for any student with disabilities, is the complete responsibility of the sponsoring private entity, parent, guardian, or student and may not be arranged, coordinated, or provided for by public school



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personnel.

(h) No student may be released from a required core curriculum class to attend released time.

(i) Nothing in this act may be construed to:

(1) Limit the authority of local boards of education to tailor the policies required by this section to meet their specific needs; provided the policy reflects the requirements of this section and complies with applicable law, rules, and regulations; or

(2) Require local boards of education that adopted policies permitting released time instruction prior to July 1, 2026, to amend or alter those policies; provided the policies are otherwise in compliance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations."

Section 2. This act shall become effective on July 1, 2026.